**AWARDS SPECIAL** 2022 RESULTS

# World Soccer®

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

February 2023

# PELÉ

## 24-PAGE DEDICATION TO THE KING

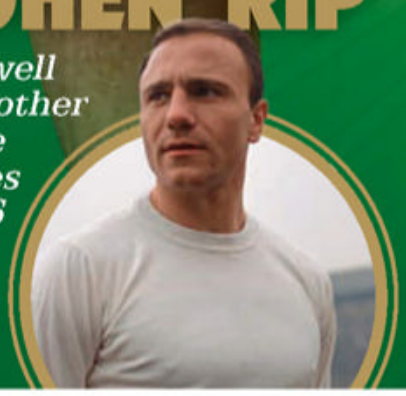
*Turn over for your special tribute* **PELÉ COVER**

**PLUS**

- CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- CHINESE SUPER LEAGUE
- WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
- VENEZUELA

## GEORGE COHEN RIP

*Farewell to another of the heroes of '66*



**INSIDE**

## LEWANDOWSKI

*Interview with the ESM Golden Shoe winner*

## NAPOLI

*Special club profile on the high-flyers*

## 2023 PREVIEW

*Football's biggest stories ...before they happen*

KELSEYmedia
9 770043 903385 02
£5.99
www.worldsoccer.com

PitchPublishing

# GREAT NEW FOOTY TITLES TO KICK OFF THE NEW YEAR

View our latest offers at Amazon

Scan the QR code with your mobile device to visit the Pitch Publishing Amazon store and view the latest deals and offers

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Read sample chapters from hundreds of top sports titles FREE and register for our newsletter to receive all the latest news on forthcoming releases, reviews and awards.

www.pitchpublishing.co.uk

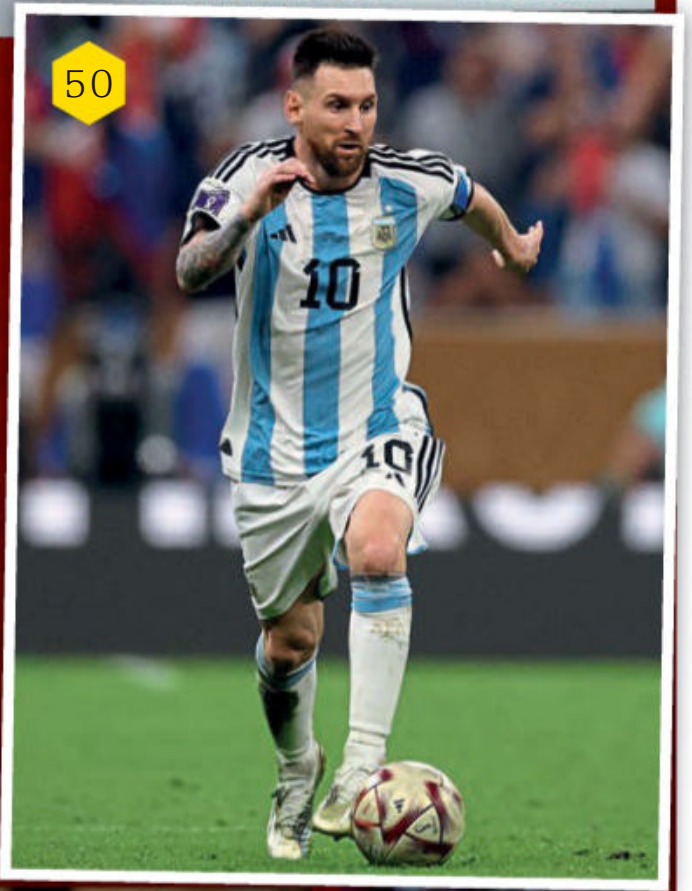
pitch

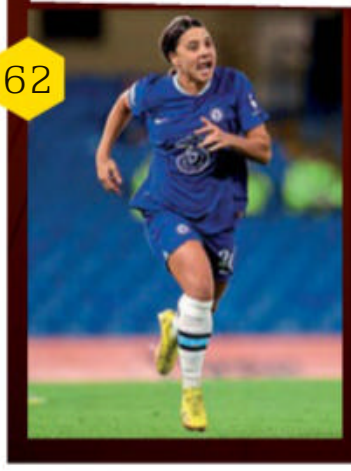
WorldSoccer
Global football intelligence since 1960

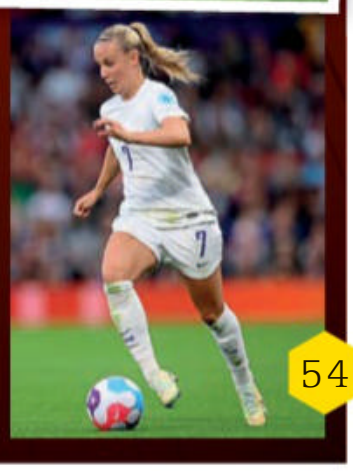


# Contents

AWARDS & PEOPLE OF THE YEAR





## THE WORLD THIS MONTH
People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures** Pele special
10 **From the Assistant Editor**
11 **The month in numbers**
12 **Keir Radnedge** Pele: a tribute to the King
14 **Jonathan Wilson** Man of a thousand goals
15 **Pele in numbers**
16 **Jim Holden** Pele in the USA
17 **Obituaries** George Cohen
18 **European competition draws**

## SPECIAL FEATURE
20 ***O Rei* – The King**
26 **Pele interview**
76 **Preview of 2023**

## EYEWITNESS
28 **Brazil**
32 **Lithuania**

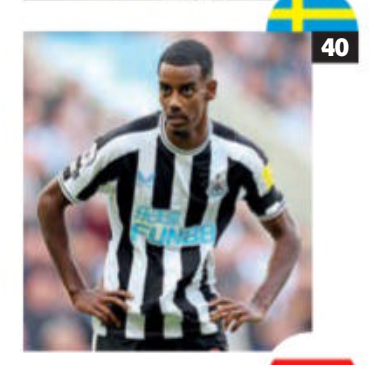
## HEADLINERS
36 **Juventus**
37 **Garang Kuol**
38 **Venezuela**
39 **Casa Pia**

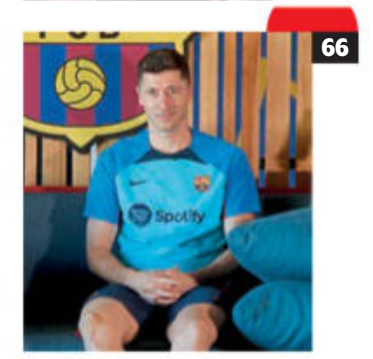
## SPOTLIGHT
40 **Alexander Isak**

## FACE TO FACE
66 **Robert Lewandowski**

## CLUB PROFILE
70 **Napoli**

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
84 **Champions League group stage review**



Follow World Soccer online

FOOTBALL 24-7

Follow @worldsoccermag  Like World Soccer Magazine

SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
Exclusive subscription offer
See page 8

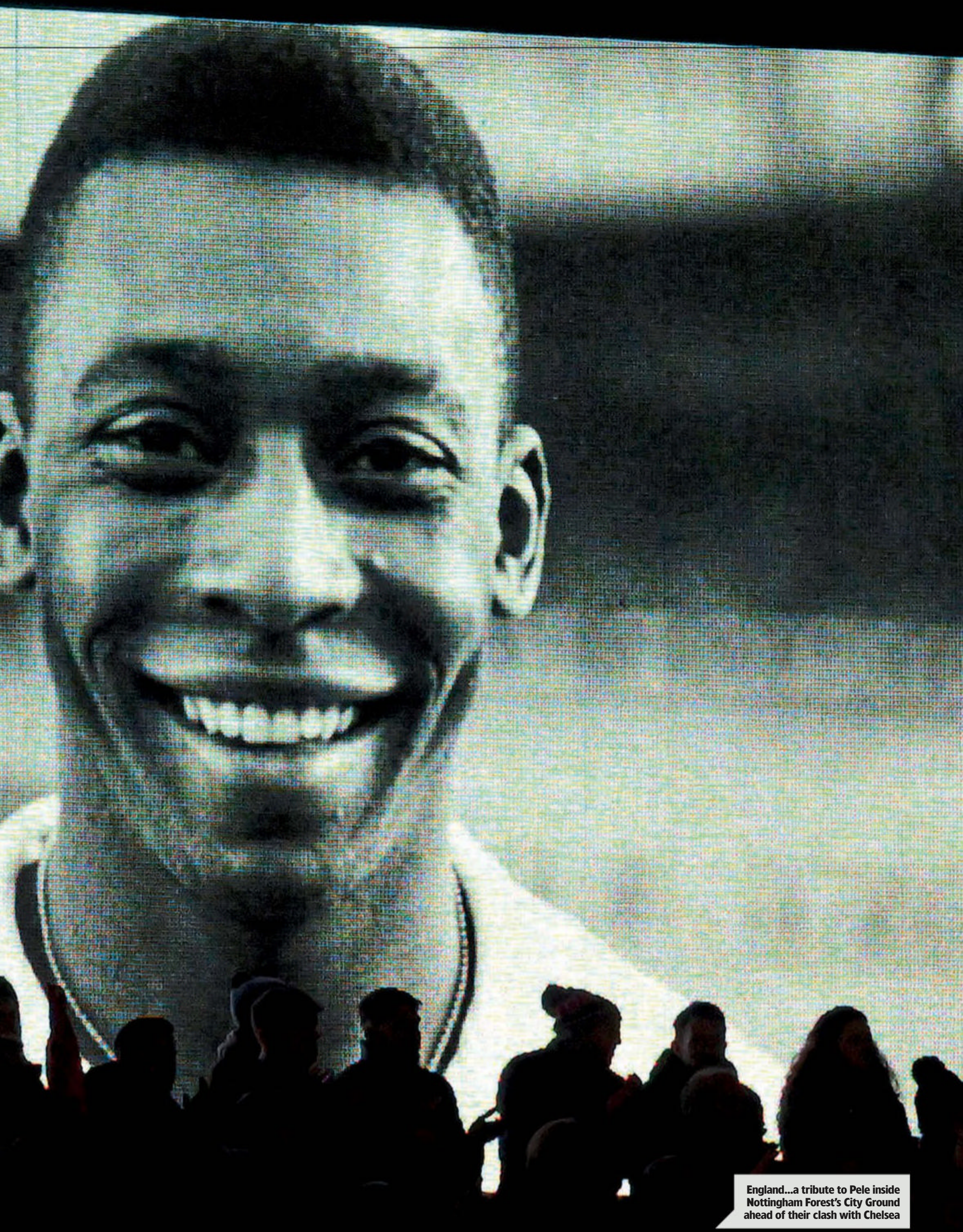
## World Service
Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

88 **Africa** CAF Champions League preview
90 **Asia** AFC Champions League west zone
92 **China** Chinese Super League review
94 **Saint Martin/Sint Maarten** Across the border

PLUS 95 Global diary 96 ESM XI 97 Results, tables, fixtures

# In Pictures

**The global game caught on camera**



England...a tribute to Pele inside Nottingham Forest's City Ground ahead of their clash with Chelsea

Brazil...a photograph of a young Edson Arantes do Nascimento inside the Pele Museum in Santos

France...supporters pay tribute to Pele during the Ligue 1 match between Nantes and Auxerre

England...Newcastle United midfielder Bruno Guimaraes wears a signed Pele No.10 shirt ahead of his side's Premier League meeting with Leeds

Argentina...a street mural in Buenos Aires depicts Diego Maradona and Pele embracing each other

Spain...players of Real Sociedad and Osasuna observe a minute's silence ahead of their La Liga meeting

Paraguay...the headquarters of CONMEBOL in Asuncion pays its respects to Pele

# UNRIVALLED AUTHORITY ON THE GAME OF SOCCER.

**Save 58%**

**6 ISSUES FOR JUST £15!**

## Don't miss this special New Year Sale offer

- Never miss an issue with FREE UK delivery direct to your door
- Pay just **£15** for **6 issues** – a saving of **58%** on the shop price
- You'll also receive the *World Soccer* e-newsletter

# STAY INFORMED STAY INSPIRED.

## Subscribe online now at shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSCP0123 or call 01959 543 747 quote WSCP0123

**Calls charged at your standard network rate. Lines are open 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday.**

Terms and conditions: UK offer only. You will pay £15.00 for 6 issues (6 months). You will then continue to pay £24.99 every 6 months. Discounts are calculated on the full cover price. For overseas rates please visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC. Offer ends March 31, 2023. Here at Kelsey Publishing we take your privacy seriously and will only use your personal information to administer your account and to provide the products and services you have requested from us. We will only contact you about our special offers via the preferences you have indicated, and you can update these at any time by emailing us at cs@kelsey.co.uk or by calling us on 01959 543 747.

# FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

During the World Cup, a video circulated on social media with the caption: "Pele did it first". The premise was simple: it showed a compilation of some of the game's greatest talents performing outrageous pieces of skill or scoring iconic goals, followed by grainy black-and-white footage of Pele doing the exact same thing decades earlier. Cruyff, Maradona, Zidane, Ronaldo (both Brazilian and Portuguese), Messi, Neymar…the call-list went on and on.

The video was liked, shared and viewed millions of times. Part of its appeal perhaps lay in the fact that much of the footage had not been seen before by many. Beyond the 1970 World Cup, there is relatively little of Pele's career that has been widely seen by modern audiences, with large parts of it taking place away from TV cameras. Indeed, it is estimated that only half of the 1,000+ goals that he scored in his career were caught on film.

**Pele is simultaneously the most famous name in football, yet also shrouded in mystery**

It is an intriguing contradiction: Pele is simultaneously the most famous name in football, yet also shrouded in mystery. There is a mythology around him, a legend so extraordinary that later generations have found it impossible to believe. He has almost become like a fairy-tale character, more fiction than fact. After all, how could he possibly be as good as the stories claimed?

Yet Pele was real, and his exploits did live up to the mythology. In this issue's tributes to him, we have attempted to tell some of those stories.

It seems fitting that we should pay tribute to Pele in our annual awards issue, where we recognise the finest players, teams and managers of 2022. Congratulations to Lionel Messi, who has been named *World Soccer*'s Player of the Year for a record sixth time. Our panel selected the Argentine after he inspired his country to the World Cup trophy, bookmarking his incredible career by delivering on the global stage at his final time of trying. An outstanding achievement, undoubtedly; but Pele did it first.

**Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor**

**World Cup king...Pele holds the Jules Rimet trophy** *Credit: Alamy*

BRAZIL

## Tributes pour in for Pele

The world of football stood still in mourning after it was announced that Brazil's greatest-ever player had passed away at the age of 82, having been hospitalised during the World Cup with colon cancer.

"Before Pele, '10' was just a number," said Neymar, who matched Pele's scoring record for Brazil during the World Cup, in an Instagram post. "Before Pele football was just a sport. Pele has changed it all...He turned football into art, into entertainment. He's gone but his magic remains."

Ronaldo, the other player in Brazil's top three record scorers, added: "Unique. Cool. Technical. Creative. Perfect. One of a kind. Where Pele arrived, he stayed. Without ever leaving the top, he leaves us today."

In a statement, the president of the Brazilian federation, Ednaldo Rodrigues, said that they would "pay all possible tributes to the greatest athlete of all time," with the Maracana Stadium and Christ The Redeemer statue lit up in green and gold as a salute to Pele.

Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Kylian Mbappe were all among the current generation

"We're going to ask every country in the world to name one of their football stadiums with the name of Pele"

**FIFA president Gianni Infantino offers his own tribute to Pele**

to offer their condolences and praise the legacy of Pele, while his former team-mates and opponents offered the most effusive tributes.

"Today, football lost the greatest man in its history – and I lost a unique friend," said Franz Beckenbauer, who played with Pele in the North American Soccer League. "I went to the US in 1977 because I really wanted to play on a team with Pele at New York Cosmos. This time at his side was one of the greatest experiences of my career."

Geoff Hurst was in the England team that lost to Pele's Brazil at the 1970 World Cup, and described him as "without doubt the best footballer I ever played against." Hurst added: "For me, Pele remains the greatest of all time and I was proud to be on the pitch with him. RIP Pele and thank you."

Pele's coffin was lying-in-state in Santos' Vila Belmiro stadium, with hundreds of thousands of fans waiting for hours to file past it and pay their respects. Not among them, however, were many of Brazil's more recent footballing heroes, with the likes of Neymar, Ronaldo and Kaka coming in for criticism at home for failing to attend.

"Anyone can put a photo of Pele on their Instagram. Would it cost you to have given up two days of your holidays?" asked former Brazil midfielder Jose Ferreira Neto, who now works as a TV presenter.

# The month in numbers

**Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football...**

**4**
Players to have made over 600 Premier League appearances after James Milner joined Frank Lampard, Gareth Barry and Ryan Giggs in surpassing the milestone.

**$622.8m**
Total amount spent on agent fees for men's transfers in 2022, according to FIFA.

**31**
Years between Claudio Ranieri's first and second spells in charge of Cagliari after the 71-year-old manager was reappointed as the club's boss.

**3**
Terms that Gianni Infantino will serves as FIFA president after it was confirmed that he will stand unopposed in March's election.

**£250,000**
Reported transfer fee paid by Tottenham Hotspur Women to Chelsea Women for striker Bethany England – a new British and Women's Super League record.

**14**
Matches for Manchester City striker Erling Haaland to score 20 Premier League goals – the quickest player to reach the tally in history, surpassing Kevin Phillips' 21 games.

**€200m**
Reported annual salary of Cristiano Ronaldo, including commercial deals, with his new club Al Nassr after the Portugal legend completed his move to Saudi Arabia.

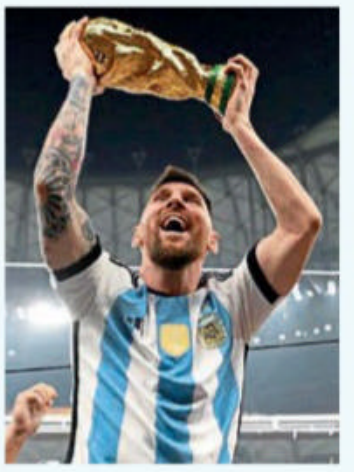
**Record earnings ...Ronaldo during his unveiling at Al Nassr**

**€40m**
Transfer fee paid by Liverpool to PSV for Dutch forward Cody Gakpo after his impressive displays at the World Cup.

**7**
Years on Benoit Badiashile's new Chelsea contract after the French centre-back completed a £35m move from Monaco.

**€120m**
Release clause of Benfica and Argentina midfielder Enzo Fernandez, who has been heavily linked with a move to Chelsea.

**74.5m**
Likes on Lionel Messi's Instagram photo of him holding the World Cup trophy – a new record for the website.



**Instagram...Leo Messi's record-breaking photo**

**7**
Clubs that Luis Suarez has signed for in his career after the Uruguayan legend joined Brazilian outfit Gremio on a two-year contract.

**1**
Former England midfielder Scott Parker recently became the first Englishman to manage Club Brugge in the Belgian giants' history.

**4**
Spells in charge of Peterborough United for Darren Ferguson, who was reappointed by the League One club in January.

**13**
Players to have won over 200 caps for the United States Women's national team after Alex Morgan reached the landmark in a 2-1 friendly win against Germany.

# Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

## The King

Pele. Four letters. One name. One entire world of social and sporting enchantment. This was the legacy of the man and the footballer. His genius, personality and humility connected with not only fans of all ages around the world but with millions for whom the game meant next-to-nothing.

Wherever he went he stopped the traffic. His presence once briefly stopped a civil war in Nigeria.

Since Pele's death several biographers have spoken of regret at failing to reach beyond his football. But that was the point. Pele's life was football – from his childhood to the latter years. Simply being Pele was synonymous with the *Jogo Bonito* he graced.

The zenith of Pele's career crowned a watershed convergence for football. The 1970 World Cup in Mexico, where he led Brazil to a third triumph in 12 years, was the first to be televised in colour, much being played in the debilitating midday heat which provided valuable extra time and space for the most technical players. No player boasted greater technical skill than Brazil's virtuoso.

The mix of Brazilian brilliance and colour television attracted new, rich advertisers and sponsors with whose largesse FIFA and then the most adept leagues and clubs would create a new corporate face for football.

Pele stood around 5ft 8in (173cm) but was as prodigious in the air as he was matchless on the ground. In Mexico he headed Brazil's first goal in the 4-1 final demolition of Italy. No repeat here of the astonishing "save of the century" defiance from Gordon Banks in the 1-0 defeat of England.

That group match threw up a series of iconic images, most notably the post-match exchange of shirts between Pele and England captain Bobby Moore. They expected to meet again in the final but football's gods had other ideas.

**The King...Pele photographed in 1963**

Back then the absence of satellite communication and video wizardry meant bright new kids on the South American block were unknown beyond their homeland unless glimpsed every four years at a World Cup and/or imported by clubs of Italy and Spain.

Hence nobody beyond Minas Gerais was aware in 1955 of the football volcano about to erupt when a 15-year-old made his debut for Santos.

Pele – he did not like the nickname, never knew its provenance and fought kids who taunted him at school – had been born in the town of Tres Coracoes (Three Hearts). Father Dondinho had been a professional in the 1940s. His career was wrecked by a knee injury but his faith in his son's talent was shared by the 1934 World Cup star Waldemar de Brito. The latter's recommendation led to Pele harvesting goals galore for the youth teams of Bauru AC and then Santos.

Rapidly Pele earned national and then international recognition. At 16 he was playing for Brazil. At 17 he was named in the World Cup squad heading to Sweden, despite a knee injury. Brazil began erratically with a 3-0 win over Austria and 0-0 draw with England. Senior players, led by left-back Nilton Santos, persuaded coach Vicente Feola to bring in Pele and the bow-legged outside-right Garrincha. The rest is history.

Pele scored the lone winning

goal against Wales in the quarter-finals, a stunning hat-trick against an injury-weakened France in the semis, then two more in the crowning triumph over hosts Sweden. Pele volleyed his first goal after impudently chipping the ball over a baffled defender and headed a late second. At the final whistle he collapsed in tears on the shoulders of goalkeeper Gilmar.

Four years later Brazil were champions again, in Chile. Pele scored in the opening victory over Mexico but pulled a thigh muscle in a goalless draw against Czechoslovakia. He limped out on the wing and the Czechoslovaks, led by great playmaker Josef Masopust, courteously held back when the ball was played in his direction. Pele never forgot the gesture.

Four months later Pele led Santos to a memorable victory over Benfica and emerging young rival Eusebio in the World Club Cup. Santos won 3-2 at home then 5-2 in Lisbon after a hat-trick in one of the most awesome exhibitions of Pele's career.

Santos retained their world title the following year by beating Milan. Real Madrid wanted to buy him, so did Juventus. But, in an era when a European transfer was not the be-all and end-all, pressure from politicians and pleas from fans persuaded him to stay home. The decision proved lucrative. Santos cashed in on the Pele name with a never-ending series of exhibition matches all around the world. Santos demanded $10,000 per match in cash on the day; the only proviso was that Pele had to play.

The national team took a back seat. Maybe that was a contributory factor in the poor World Cup finals campaign in England in 1966. Pele took a battering but he was not alone at a time of toleration for the lethal tackle from behind. Also, while he was a great sportsman he was also his own best bodyguard, quick on the draw against defenders who threatened to cut up rough.

The late 1960s saw Santos ramp up the jet-fuelled money-grabbing pace. In the circumstances it was remarkable that Pele was fit and eager to envisage a return to the World Cup arena in Mexico in 1970. As he told me years later, he always believed he and the Jules Rimet trophy had "unfinished business".

The tale of how Pele avenged his 1966 nightmare has been told too many times in words and pictures to demand much re-telling. As long as the game is played, the 1970 World Cup finals will be revered as the apotheosis of a great player, not only at his very best, but achieving the intrinsic and wider rewards his talent deserved.

As a 17-year-old Pele had scored one of the unforgettable World Cup goals in the final against Sweden – in 1970 he twice nearly surpassed it. First, against Czechoslovakia, he just missed scoring with a shot from his own half of the field, and against Uruguay he sold an outrageous dummy to goalkeeper Ladislao Mazurkiewicz and just missed again.

In the final, Brazil benefited from Italy having been stretched to extra-time in the semi-finals. Pele & Co capitalised. He headed their first goal and set up the third and fourth for Jairzinho and Carlos Alberto.

> As long as the game is played, the 1970 World Cup finals will be revered as the apotheosis of a great player

Brazil's ecstatic fans ripped off almost all his kit amid delirious celebrations in the Estadio Azteca.

The following summer, aged 31, Pele ended his Brazil career, finishing with a record 77 goals in 92 games. The battering his body had taken would bring mobility problems later in life. He would have been justified in retiring altogether. He had won a record three World Cups. But he had also fallen repeated victim to fatally flawed business advice. He was in no position to refuse the lure of one last payday in the United States.

Clive Toye, the UK sports journalist who fronted up for the Cosmos in New York, sold Pele the vision of converting "this unconquered land" to soccer. Over three remarkable years Cosmos were the fashionable ticket in town. Pele led them to the 1977 NASL title and retired after a farewell friendly in which he played one half for Cosmos and one half for Santos. Not much later both Cosmos and the NASL collapsed. But the flame had been lit. Without Pele's inspiration the US would not have developed the momentum to win World Cup hosting rights in 1994.

By now Pele had transcended not only football but sport itself. Having learned costly lessons, he took just about any and every promotional deal offered, from Pepsi-Cola and MasterCard to Subway and Viagra. By now Pele's public had invested far too much love in the man to resent his pursuit of security.

Critics carped that Pele had swerved political controversy, had acquiesced at being used by a sequence of unedifying presidents, but he supported a variety of anti-poverty initiatives in his belief that football was a weapon with a healing power all its own.

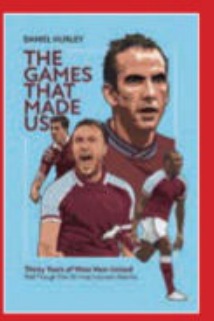
I had the privilege of being Pele's English-language ghostwriter, after he had retired, at various World Cups and other tournaments. The demands on him were relentless but he was always friendly, polite and eager to talk football as we were bundled through the crushes of adoring fans from hotels to cars to TV studios. At one FIFA Gala he shocked the obsequious power-brokers milling around him to break out across the room and swallow me up in one of his great bear hugs.

He transcended football like no other individual. A world figure. A remarkable human being. His legacy is magnificent and will endure as long as football is being played.

## BOOKS THIS MONTH

**BACK IN THE BIG TIME**
*By John Dyson*
*(Pitch Publishing, £18.99)*

*Back in the Big Time: Sheffield Wednesday's Return to Division One* tells the story of the Owls' return to the top flight after 14 years in the wilderness. Drawing on detailed research, it shines new light on the period 1984-86, combining exclusive interviews with key players, management and club officials with the perspective of supporters and others to piece together a new history. This is the unfiltered story of a side that did not give up.




**THE GAMES THAT MADE US**
*By Daniel Hurley*
*(Pitch Publishing, £18.99)*

This is the story of an unforgettable period in West Ham United's history told through the club's 50 most important matches over the past 30 years, with each game put into context and the consequences examined. From Dicks to Di Canio, Harewood to Antonio, Redknapp to Allardyce, this book tells tales of last-minute winners and last-second heartbreak, promotion, relegation, European nights and so much more.

# Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

## The man of a thousand goals

The numbers can become a little off-putting. When you see that Pele won ten Paulista championships with Santos, the tendency is for the eyes to glaze over a little. Even if there is a recognition that Brazilian state championships were worth rather more in those days than they are now, and that Sao Paulo state has a larger population than all but around half a dozen European countries, the fact that he won ten almost devalues his achievement; if you can win that many, the thought-process runs, how hard can they really have been to win?

The tendency, anyway, is to focus on his World Cup triumphs, which is understandable enough: they, after all, were the ones played out on the global stage, when the quality was beyond dispute. Elements of Pele's club career have come to seem vaguely farcical, if not slightly distasteful, most notably the furore around his 1,000th goal.

By late 1969, everybody agreed Pele was approaching 1,000 goals. The problem was that nobody knew exactly how many he had scored. The Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD) had no official stats department, so Santos' statistician Mario Lamas and a local journalist known as De Vaney got together and totalled up his goals. On October 24, they announced that Pele was on 995, a figure accepted by the Rio paper *Jornal do Brasil* and *Jornal da Tarde* of Sao Paulo. But a sportswriter from *A Gazeta Esportiva*, Thomaz Mazzoni, had done his own count and come up with 998. *O Globo*, the big Rio paper, backed him.

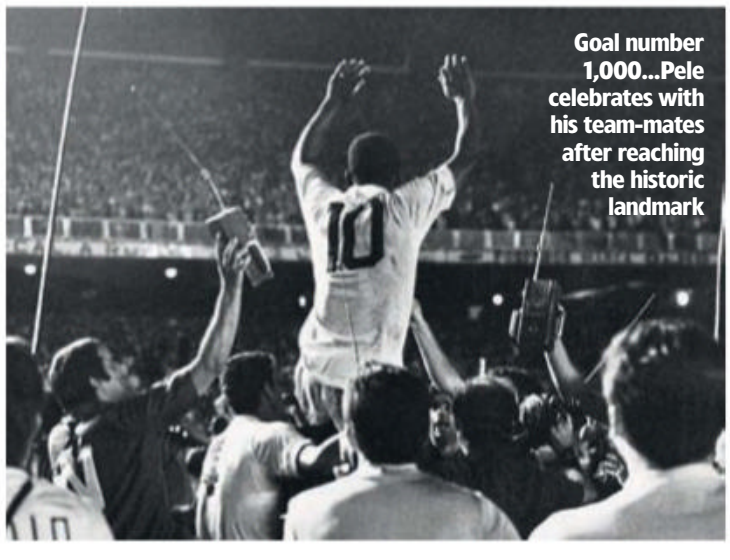
The discrepancy came down to one goal scored in a game that was abandoned because of heavy rain and two goals, scored several years earlier, which had been noted as own goals in the official reports. The CBD, called upon to arbitrate, settled for the lower figure. Much later, researchers working on a documentary found two more goals that had been omitted, meaning Pele's 1,000th goal actually came in a game against Santa Cruz on November 12. But nobody realised that at the time.

**Pele at Santos... a photo of Pele from 1961**

> By late 1969, everybody agreed Pele was approaching 1,000 goals. The problem was that nobody knew exactly how many he had scored

So the circus moved on. Santos played a friendly in Paraiba against the local side Botafogo to mark the unveiling of their new floodlights. But there was unease about Pele potentially reaching the landmark figure in such an inconsequential fixture (one that was billed as a training session to get around regulations forbidding friendlies being played within 72 hours of a league game) 2,000 miles from home. And what if the Botafogo players decided they wanted to be part of history and helped Pele get the two goals he needed? As it was, he converted a penalty and then dropped deep, making no effort to approach the Botafogo box, eventually taking over in goal.

On 999, Pele played against Bahia. Pennants were printed and three match balls used, so one could be placed in the club museum, one could be given to the state football federation and one handed to Pele.



**Goal number 1,000...Pele celebrates with his team-mates after reaching the historic landmark**

He hit the bar, but didn't score. In the next game, though, against Vasco da Gama, Pele converted a 77th-minute penalty. He had once described penalties as a cowardly way to score, and had spoken of his desire to reach his landmark with a piece of skill or improvisation, but he was sick of the fuss. Having side-footed the ball past the Vasco keeper Andrada, Pele was engulfed by players and well-wishers and carried shoulder-high to the side of the pitch where he gave a speech about the need to protect children, then got hiccups.

Which says what, exactly? Mainly that even before his apotheosis at the 1970 World Cup, Pele was an absurdly famous figure, and that football always has a tendency to become preposterous when individual achievements are allowed to intrude upon the basic demand to win games. And perhaps also that goal tallies, when there is so little agreement about what should be included, are probably not worth getting over-excited about.

Far more significant, and a far better indicator of what made Pele a great player, were his performances in the two legs of the 1963 Copa Libertadores final. Santos had won the title the previous season, Pele scoring twice in the play-off against Penarol. Against Boca Juniors they faced an extremely physically robust side that was more than prepared to kick Pele out of the game. But he was relentless across the two legs, forever running at the Boca defence, finding angles, riding challenges. Santos won 3-2 in Brazil and then, with the score at 1-1 in Buenos Aires, Pele sealed the win eight minutes from time. That was his triumph.

The 1970 World Cup might have sealed his international legacy but in the club game it was those games against Boca that confirmed he was a great. There will always be sceptics about the football of the past, but in those games, despite the brutality, he was undisputedly magnificent. His numbers are extraordinary, but they are not really what Pele was about.

# Pele in numbers

**The best facts and stats from the Brazil icon's astonishing career...**

**15**
Age at which he signed his first professional contract at Santos and when he scored on his league debut.

**16**
Years and nine months – the age at which he scored his first goal for Brazil, against Argentina in July 1957. He remains his country's youngest-ever goalscorer.

**58**
Goals scored in a single Sao Paulo championship campaign in 1958, an average of over 1.5 goals per game.

**17**
Age of Pele at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, when he became the competition's youngest-ever goalscorer, youngest hat-trick scorer, youngest player to play in a final, youngest player to score in a final, and youngest player to lift the trophy – records that all still stand.

History... Pele made history at the 1958 World Cup

**9**
Goals scored in the Intercontinental Cup, an all-time tournament record, including the competition's only hat-trick.

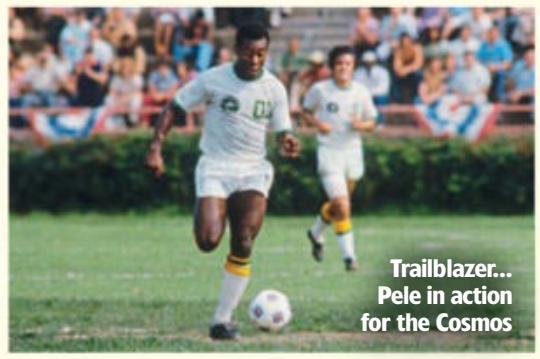
**23**
After being injured in 1962 in Chile and getting kicked out of the 1966 World Cup, Pele conceded 23 fouls in the 1970 tournament – more than any other player. Only five players have ever conceded more fouls at a single finals.

**3**
World Cup winners' medals to his name, the only player in history to win so many.

**77**
Goals scored for Brazil in 92 appearances, placing him level with Neymar at the top of the all-time rankings. His ratio of 0.84 goals-per-game is also a *Selecao* record.

**7**
Hat-tricks scored for Brazil, another record.

**18**
Months that Pele was semi-retired when he decided to return to football in 1975 and play for the New York Cosmos in the North American Soccer League.


Trailblazer... Pele in action for the Cosmos

**643**
Goals for Santos in 659 competitive games for the Brazilian giants, a club record.

**8**
Assists provided at the World Cup, a record he jointly holds with Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi, including six in 1970 (a record for a single tournament) and three in finals (one in 1958 and two in 1970) – another record.

**1,283**
Total estimated career goals for club and country (including friendly matches) scored in just 1,363 games.

**1999**
Year that he was named Athlete of the Century by the International Olympic Committee.

**7**
Ballon d'Or awards retrospectively awarded to Pele in 2016, when *France Football* magazine published a re-evaluation of the award's early years to include non-Europeans.

Legend...Pele receives an honorary Ballon d'Or in 2014

# Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

## Pele in the USA

When the next World Cup is played across America in 2026, the players and the vast knowledgeable crowds will have one man to thank: Pele.

There are many reasons why the Brazilian legend is considered the most iconic figure in the history of football: the power and glory of his countless goals, his magnetic presence on and off the field, his unique status as the only player to win the World Cup three times. Another factor is less celebrated, but of immense importance; Pele was the man who saved soccer as a serious sport in the United States.

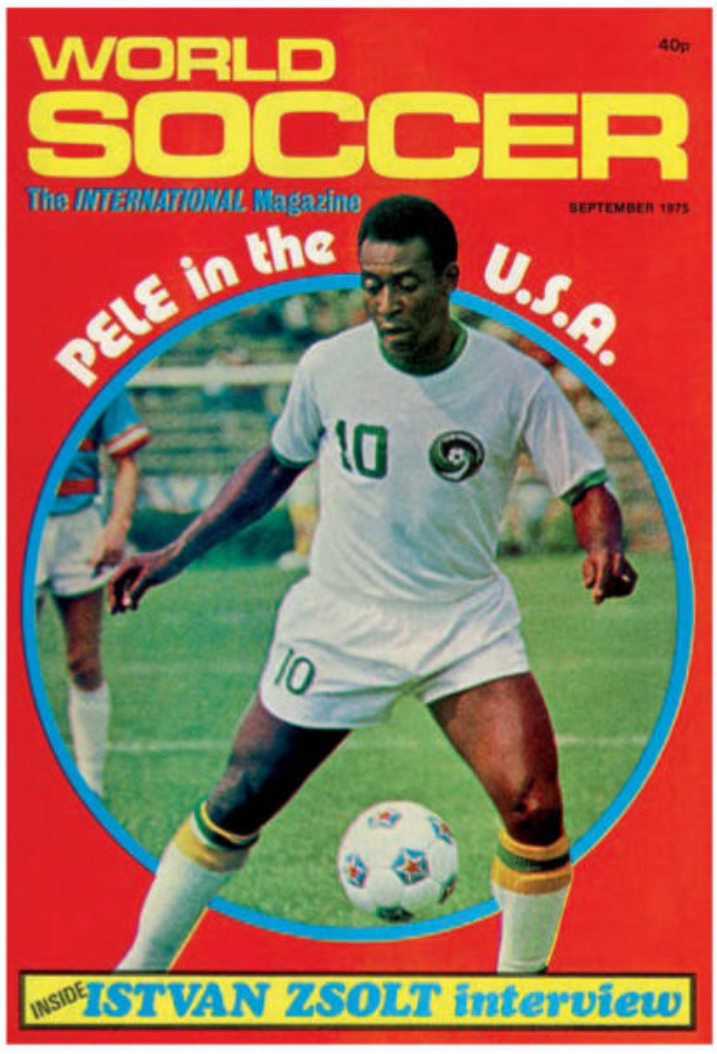
The game was dying on its feet for lack of interest when he arrived in the summer of 1975 to join the New York Cosmos in the NASL (North American Soccer League), a team filled with journeymen footballers playing in a sporting wilderness. There were precious few spectators, zero media coverage and commercial indifference. Many in America viewed soccer as a game to be shunned, whether as spectator or participant.

Pele changed that instantly and forever. Mission impossible was accomplished.

"It is my hope that I can help to make the sport I love as important here in America as in the rest of the world," he said at the press conference to announce his presence.

A $7 million contract was worth every last cent as Pele proved to be a supreme sporting evangelist, breaking down scepticism and prejudice against soccer. His first match for the Cosmos was broadcast in 22 countries, and soon the arenas of America were filled with fans.

Within a week the renowned US journalist Larry Merchant wrote of Pele: "He is Babe Ruth, the Rolling Stones and Billy Graham in one dynamic box-office package. He could sell out Siberia." Soon after he was featured on the front cover of *Sports Illustrated*, while every NASL city that he visited posted record attendances.




**Pele in the USA... *World Soccer*'s September 1975 front cover**

It was by no means certain Pele would have such a mighty impact. He was little known in the States; it was his character and charm as much as his football brilliance that delivered success. The Americans could sense a true superstar in their midst.

The New York Cosmos became a global sporting and commercial phenomenon, and other great names of soccer moved to NASL clubs. World Cup-winning captains Carlos Alberto and Franz Beckenbauer both joined Pele at the Cosmos, and other stars in the league included Johan Cruyff, George Best, Bobby Moore and Gordon Banks.

Pele stayed for barely two years; his last game was in October 1977 when the Cosmos played an exhibition match against Santos, his Brazilian club. Pele played one half for each team in front of a crowd of 75,000, including Muhammad Ali, Robert Redford and Mick Jagger.

On retirement he produced an autobiography first published in New York called *My Life and the Beautiful Game*. Pele wasn't the first person to use the phrase, but when he adopted it for his book title, soccer became known the world over as The Beautiful Game.

The NASL subsided when Pele stopped playing. It folded completely in 1984 and more than a decade passed without a professional soccer league in North America until the MLS began in 1996. Even the glamour of Cruyff and Best was not enough.

While Cruyff can legitimately claim to be the most significant figure in football history in terms of how the game is played with the evolution of tactics and styles, only Pele could create the American revolution of soccer.

His two years at New York Cosmos were the inspiration for a monumental long-term grassroots legacy. Millions of kids in America now play the game in preference to the established sports of baseball, American football and basketball. There was a particular boom in women's football, which has had a huge impact on the development of the sport across the globe.

You can't travel anywhere in the United States now without seeing soccer fields and goalposts. Of the 29 clubs that will take part in MLS in 2023, 22 play at soccer-specific stadiums. The change is astonishing.

Pele was rightly proud of his achievement, and in an interview a few years ago he simply said: "It was the best thing I did in my life."

> "It is my hope that I can help to make the sport I love as important here in America as in the rest of the world"

"The best full-back I ever played against"

**Manchester United legend George Best on George Cohen**

## OBITUARIES

World Cup winner ...George Cohen

**George COHEN** (1939-2022)
Despite being forced into retirement at the age of 29 by a serious knee injury, Cohen played a lot of football during his 13-year career. After making his Fulham debut aged 17, he was a remarkably consistent performer in the side that won promotion to the First Division in 1959 and remained there for almost a decade, making 459 appearances.

Yet it was his exploits for England that earned him most recognition. Alf Ramsey – who later described Cohen as England's "greatest right-back" – handed him his international debut against Uruguay in 1964. By the time the World Cup began in the summer of 1966, Cohen had ousted the long-serving Jimmy Armfield as the Three Lions' starting right-back.

Far more than just a defender, Cohen's speed, stamina and crossing were vital components to Ramsey's system, providing the width in a team that was known as the "wingless wonders", while also helping to cover for the lack of pace of centre-halves Jack Charlton and Bobby Moore.

Yet within 18 months of the final win over West Germany, Cohen was struck down by a knee injury while playing for Fulham. After lengthy treatment, he was forced to hang up his boots in 1969.

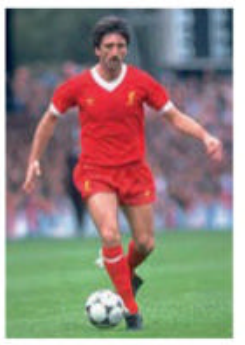
The 37-cap defender was the first member of England's 1966 team to retire, while his death leaves Bobby Charlton and Geoff Hurst as the last surviving members of the final's starting XI.

**Assem ALLAM** (1939-2022)
The owner of Hull City from December 2010 to January 2022, Allam's tenure was highly divisive, despite overseeing two promotions to the Premier League.

**David GOLD** (1936-2023)
The former Birmingham City owner purchased West Ham United in 2010, along with his business partner David Sullivan, and remained the Hammers' joint owner until his death in January. Under Gold and Sullivan, West Ham moved from their historic home at Upton Park to the London Stadium in 2016.

**Fernando GOMES** (1956-2022)
Porto's all-time record scorer with 355 goals in 451 games across two spells at the club. He lifted two Portuguese league titles before joining Sporting Gijon in 1980, then returned two years later to win three more. Tragically broke his leg just days before the 1986-87 European Cup final triumph over Bayern Munich.

**Miodrag JESIC** (1958-2022)
The ex-Yugoslavia defender's 25-year management career included spells in over a dozen countries and trophy wins in Tunisia, Bulgaria, Libya and Myanmar. His career highlight came at CSKA Sofia, where he won the 2004-05 league title, before going on to seal a shock 1-0 win at Anfield during qualification for the following season's Champions League.



"Doc"...David Johnson in action for Liverpool

**David JOHNSON** (1951-2022)
Affectionately known as "Doc", the forward began his career at Everton before excelling with Ipswich Town. From there he joined Liverpool where he won four league titles and three European Cups. In 1978 he made history as the first man to score for both sides in the Merseyside derby.

**Jimmy O'ROURKE** (1946-2022)
A Hibernian legend, having made his debut as a 16-year-old to become the club's youngest-ever player, and shortly afterwards their youngest goalscorer too.

Tottenham mainstay ...Maurice Norman

**Maurice NORMAN** (1934-2022)
The former centre-half played a vital role in Bill Nicholson's Tottenham side that lifted the league and cup double in 1960-61. He won 23 caps for England, going to the 1958 and 1962 World Cups.

**Frank McGARVEY** (1956-2023)
After making his name at Alex Ferguson's St Mirren side in the late '70s, McGarvey was snapped up by Liverpool. But after a year in which he failed to break into the first team, the striker returned to Scotland with Celtic, scoring 100 goals in the top flight and helping the club win two titles.

Wand of a left foot ...Sinisa Mihajlovic in action for Lazio

**Sinisa MIHAJLOVIC** (1969-2022)
A silky defender and renowned set-piece taker with a rocket left foot. After starring in Red Star Belgrade's shock European Cup win in 1991, he spent the rest of his club career in Italy, representing Roma, Sampdoria, Lazio and Internazionale. He also played at the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000 for FR Yugoslavia. After his playing career he remained in Italy as manager, taking charge of several clubs either side of a year in charge of Serbia.

**Neil ROBINSON** (1957-2022)
Former full-back for Everton, Swansea, Grimsby and Darlington, who claimed to be the EFL's first-ever vegan player.

Crystal Palace stalwart ...keeper John Jackson

**Cor VAN DER GIJP** (1931-2022)
A prolific goalscorer for Feyenoord in the 1950s and '60s, Van der Gijp helped the club win back-to-back Eredivisie titles in 1961 and 1962.

**John JACKSON** (1942-2022)
Goalkeeper who played 388 games for Crystal Palace between 1964 and 1973, placing him sixth on their all-time list.

"We will have to compete, going to Manchester against a really top rival and an historic side which has grown a lot with the arrival of [Erik] ten Hag...the toughest rival once again in the Europa League"

**Barcelona coach Xavi on drawing Manchester United in the Europa League knockout round play-offs**

# The road to Istanbul

This year's Champions League final will be played at the location of one of the most famous finals in the competition's history: Liverpool's 2005 victory over Milan

Champions League final...Turkey's Ataturk Olympic Stadium

## Champions League

**ROUND OF 16 FIRST LEGS**

**FEBRUARY 14**
Milan v Tottenham Hotspur
Paris Saint-Germain v Bayern Munich
**FEBRUARY 15**
Borussia Dortmund v Chelsea
Club Brugge v Benfica
**FEBRUARY 21**
Eintracht Frankfurt v Napoli
Liverpool v Real Madrid
**FEBRUARY 22**
Internazionale v Porto
RB Leipzig v Manchester City

**SECOND LEGS**

**MARCH 7**
Benfica v Club Brugge
Chelsea v Borussia Dortmund
**MARCH 8**
Bayern Munich v Paris Saint-Germain
Tottenham Hotspur v Milan
**MARCH 14**
Porto v Internazionale
Manchester City v RB Leipzig
**MARCH 15**
Napoli v Eintracht Frankfurt
Real Madrid v Liverpool

**QUARTER-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** April 11/12
**SECOND LEGS:** April 18/19

**SEMI-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** May 9/10
**SECOND LEGS:** May 16/17

**FINAL**
**JUNE 10**
Ataturk Olympic Stadium, Istanbul

## Europa League

**KNOCKOUT ROUND PLAY-OFFS**
**FIRST LEGS:** February 16
**SECOND LEGS:** February 23
Ajax v Union Berlin
Barcelona v Manchester United
Bayer Leverkusen v Monaco
Juventus v Nantes
Red Bull Salzburg v Roma
Sevilla v PSV
Shakhtar Donetsk v Rennes
Sporting v Midtjylland

**EIGHT GROUP WINNERS ADVANCE DIRECTLY TO THE ROUND OF 16**
Arsenal, Fenerbahce, Real Betis, Union Saint-Gilloise, Real Sociedad, Feyenoord, Freiburg, Ferencvaros

**ROUND OF 16**
**DRAW:** February 24
**FIRST LEGS:** March 9
**SECOND LEGS:** March 16

**QUARTER-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** April 13
**SECOND LEGS:** April 20

**SEMI-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** May 11
**SECOND LEGS:** May 18

**FINAL**
**MAY 31**
Puskas Arena, Budapest

## Europa Conference League

**KNOCKOUT ROUND PLAY-OFFS**
**FIRST LEGS:** February 16
**SECOND LEGS:** February 23
AEK Larnaca v Dnipro-1
Bodo/Glimt v Lech Poznan
Braga v Fiorentina
Lazio v CFR Cluj
Ludogorets v Anderlecht
Qarabag v Gent
Sheriff Tiraspol v Partizan Belgrade
Trabzonspor v Basel

**EIGHT GROUP WINNERS ADVANCE DIRECTLY TO THE ROUND OF 16**
Istanbul Basaksehir, West Ham United, Villarreal, Nice, AZ, Djurgarden, Sivasspor, Slovan Bratislava

**ROUND OF 16**
**DRAW:** February 24
**FIRST LEGS:** March 9
**SECOND LEGS:** March 16

**QUARTER-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** April 13
**SECOND LEGS:** April 20

**SEMI-FINALS**
**DRAW:** March 17
**FIRST LEGS:** May 11
**SECOND LEGS:** May 18

**FINAL**
**JUNE 7**
Fortuna Arena, Prague

ZAIRE'74
THE RISE AND FALL OF MOBUTU'S LEOPARDS
ETEPE KAKOKO
TSHIMEN BWANGA
MANTANTU KIDUMU
NEIL ANDREWS
Neil Andrews traces the fortunes of the first sub-Saharan team to reach the World Cup Finals

THE STORY OF THE £7M SHIRT...
and other amazing football memorabilia
IN ASSOCIATION WITH GRAHAM BUDD
HARRY HARRIS

MANCHESTER UNITED
THE MAKING OF A FOOTBALL DYNASTY
VOLUME ONE
100 GREAT MATCHES
1878 - 2021
JOHN D. T. WHITE
FOREWORD BY NORMAN WHITESIDE

BEAN THERE... DONE THAT
BY FORMER FA 'SLEAZEBUSTER'
GRAHAM BEAN
A FOOTBALL JOURNEY LIKE NO OTHER
"A blockbuster from the Sleazebuster gives astonishing insight into the dark side of the Beautiful Game. A must-read."
HENRY WINTER, THE TIMES
FOREWORD BY RAFA BENITEZ

ITALIA'90
THIRTY YEARS REVISITED
THE PLAYERS' STORIES
Foreword by PAUL GASCOIGNE
by HARRY HARRIS

"An astonishing insight into the dark side of the Beautiful Game. A must-read."
HENRY WINTER, THE TIMES

Empire Publications have been publishing sports books for over two decades covering football from every conceivable angle - this is just a small selection. Scan this QR code to see the full range.

IN SEARCH OF THE DOUBLE!
Sunderland AFC 1912/13
Paul Days & Mark Metcalf
Foreword by Cry Sheard

YOU CAN'T WIN ANYTHING WITH KIDS
WAYNE BARTON
Eric Cantona, Manchester United and the incredible 1995-96 season

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
JOHN LUDDEN
MANCHESTER & MADRID
1957-1968

Too good to go down
by WAYNE BARTON
THE INSIDE STORY OF MANCHESTER UNITED'S RELEGATION

ERNEST MANGNALL
THE ARCHITECT OF MANCHESTER FOOTBALL
BY IAIN MCCARTNEY

On sale now from Amazon and all good bookshops

CHAMPIONS AT LAST!

GREENHOFF!

SIX FOOT TWO
EYES OF BLUE

HARRY STAFFORD
MANCHESTER UNITED'S FIRST CAPTAIN MARVEL
BY IAN GARDINER - FOREWORD BY MARK WYLIE

THE KILLING OF EMILIANO SALA
The Inside Story of a Tragic Transfer
by HARRY HARRIS

don't look back in anger
The Manchester City fans' Story
MUTU ONE
by Don Price and Sean Riley

When football historian Iain McCartney founded the Manchester United Graves Scoiety he was inspired to tell the story of the only man to manage both Manchester clubs.

WWW.EMPIRE-UK.COM
0800 448 0284

NEW AND FIRST TIME AUTHORS WELCOME

The King...Pele is held aloft after winning the 1970 World Cup

# O REI

**Tim Vickery pays tribute to the king of Brazilian football**

Amid the pain of losing Pele, it is perhaps appropriate that the start of his final health crisis, and maybe his last fully lucid days, happened while the ball was rolling in Qatar. It was a time when so many illustrious names of football were gathered in one place, from where the game could pass on a collective message of love and respect to the man who did more than anyone else to establish the World Cup as the most gripping sporting event on the planet.

In 1950, a poor black nine-year-old from a small town in Brazil was shocked to see his father in tears as he listened on the radio to his country's traumatic World Cup defeat to Uruguay. Twenty years later all that had been avenged. With Pele as a spearhead, Brazil had won the trophy three times. They had become synonymous with the beautiful game, and Pele, born just over half a century after his country had finally abolished slavery, was its undisputed king. And, largely on the back of these achievements, the World Cup had become an enormous, made-for-TV affair, bringing much of the planet to a standstill for an entire month once every four years.

Mexico '70 is crucial to this process. Pele's fourth and last World Cup was the first one to be broadcast live to much of the planet. In the glistening afternoon sun, the TV images had an otherworldly aura, a magic that led many to compare them with the first moon landing a few months earlier. And, winning all of their matches on the way to a glorious triumph, the football of Pele and his wonderful supporting cast also had an out-of-this-world quality. Mexico '70 and the Brazilians who won it have always been the reference point for subsequent World Cups. Pele exited the scene leaving behind him some unforgettable memories.

He contributed four goals, of which by far the most memorable is the one that opened the scoring in the final against Italy, a header where he seemed to hang in the air for an age before beating goalkeeper Enrico Albertosi. His marker, Tarcisio Burgnich, confessed later that he had taken the field "thinking that Pele was human. I was wrong."

But the depth of Pele's talent was so extraordinary that his goals are not even close to being the most memorable moments of his 1970 campaign. There are the assists – beautifully clean in their simplicity, wonderfully calm in their vision and execution – in two important goals. First, the one that many of his team-mates believe was the decisive moment in the triumph, the goal that beat England, when he draws the defence and rolls a delightful pass into the path of Jairzinho. And there is the crowning glory, the fourth and final goal against Italy when he spots the rapid advance

**Ruled out...an injured Pele during the 1962 World Cup**

of Carlos Alberto up from right-back and slips him a perfectly weighted sideways ball that invites the crashing finish that rounds off one of the all-time great World Cup memories.

But there is more. The nearly-goals, for example. Against Czechoslovakia he surprised the goalkeeper with a shot from the halfway line that dipped narrowly wide – a rare piece of bravura these days, but positively unthinkable back then. Against England there was the bullet header that drew a wonder save from Gordon Banks. And maybe most astonishing of all is the dummy he throws Uruguay keeper Ladislao Mazurkiewicz in the semi-final when, in the blink of an eye, he improvises a move where he lets the ball run across them both before sprinting round the other side and screwing back with a shot that goes across the face of the goal and creeps just the wrong side of the post.

The speed of thought, the imagination, the brilliance of the execution, the sheer joy of physical and mental expression – there has surely never been a more complete talent in the history of football.

It is worth bearing in mind that by 1970 Pele was almost certainly past his best and that the whole thing may not have happened at all. After 1966 he had vowed not to play in any more World Cups, and it took another two years before he appeared again for the national team to build towards Mexico' 70.

The speed of thought, the imagination, the brilliance of the execution, the sheer joy of physical and mental expression – there has surely never been a more complete talent in the history of football

The Pele story is the classic play in three acts. The hero appears and conquers all. The hero goes through tribulations and his status is threatened. The hero returns and leaves the scene at a time of his choosing with a triumphant finale.

The man at the centre of the myth could almost have been designed to be the greatest football machine the world has ever seen. In addition to his athletic gifts – coaches often said that as well as being by far the outstanding player in the Brazil squad he was also the best goalkeeper – his psychological profile was also nearing perfection.

The two great motivational forces are pride and fear, and Pele had a powerful cocktail of the pair of them. From his father he inherited the easy-going side of his nature and the ready smile, plus intense pride in the pursuit of footballing excellence. Known as Dondinho, his father was a player of considerable talent. But the day of his big opportunity, a game for Atletico Mineiro, was also the day he suffered a knee injury that thwarted his dreams of stardom. This had a profound effect on his mother, a strong personality at a time when there were few outlets for female achievement. Much of her strength became channelled into fear – of being unable to provide for her children, and of the insecure nature of football as a profession. Pele had to overcome fierce maternal resistance to follow a career in the game, and along with pride in performance he could also not shake off fear of failure and its financial consequences. It meant that he pushed himself extremely hard. He was almost ludicrously ahead of his time in terms of the attention he paid both to physical preparation and also systematic thinking to give him an

Breakthrough... Pele scores his first World Cup goal against Wales in 1958

edge on the field – and that helped him become similarly ahead of his time in terms of being a global icon before the game had properly globalised.

He also had some good fortune along the way. Born in Tres Coracoes in the state of Minas Gerais, as a young boy he and the family moved to Bauru, a town some 200 miles outside Sao Paulo. The adolescent Pele excelled with the local football club, who were lucky enough to be coached by Waldemar de Brito, a star of the 1934 World Cup with strong contacts in the game. De Brito fixed Pele up with a trial at Santos at probably the most perfect time imaginable to join the club.

Santos is the port around an hour's drive down the hill from Sao Paulo. Dwarfed by the nearby metropolis, Santos has produced a club that is something of an exception in Brazilian football. All the other major clubs are from their state capital. It is extraordinary that Santos have been able to compete and thrive against the nearby big-city rivals such as Corinthians, Palmeiras and Sao Paulo – and that is overwhelmingly the consequence of the Pele years.

Before Pele joined the club, Santos had only twice been Sao Paulo state champions: first in 1935 and again in 1955, just before Pele arrived. He was able to slot into a side that was already great, surrounded by top players well capable of easing him into the first team. The wise old head was inside-forward Jair, a veteran of Brazil's 1950 side. And there was also Pagao, the first of the clever, technically gifted centre-forwards with whom he could combine. Left-winger Pepe, with his cannonball shot, was starting to make a name for himself, as was midfield enforcer Zito, a vital component of the World Cup-winning teams of 1958 and 1962. During the 1960s Santos had a fair claim to be considered the best club side in the world, with a supporting cast built around Pele. And this process was eased considerably by the fact that Pele joined a team that already had greatness in its grasp.

It was soon obvious that Brazilian football had unearthed something very special. Exactly ten months after his Santos debut in September 1956, a 16-year-old Pele was lining up for Brazil against Argentina, and was picked out after the game by opposing captain Nestor Rossi as the best player on the field.

Even so, going into Sweden 1958 his international experience was

All-rounder...Pele goes in goal during training

**Kicked out...Pele limps off after the 1966 World Cup exit to Portugal**

very limited, and an injury picked up in a warm-up game against Corinthians nearly ruled him out of the tournament. Brazil's massage specialist worked on him round the clock and, along with Garrincha, he was brought into the team for the third group game against the Soviet Union. It was Garrincha's game, but Pele's time would come.

The next match was the quarter-final against a Wales side that defended with obstinate discipline. Up in the stands Leonidas, the top scorer of the 1938 World Cup, was commentating for Brazilian radio. He was categorical. Pele had to be dropped. His voice carried considerable weight. If Brazil had been eliminated, or if another player had grabbed the glory, then the whole Pele story might have been nipped in the bud. This is why Pele always referred to the goal he scored against Wales – the only goal of the game – as the most important of his career, the one that gave him the opportunity and the confidence to go and write the next thrilling chapters.

The goal against Wales was a masterpiece of reduced space ability, turning a defender and poking the ball past Jack Kelsey. Inspired, he put three past France in the semi-final, and then another two against Sweden in the final, including an even better version of the Wales goal, chasing down the ball, lobbing a defender and running round the other side to fire home on the volley.

The skinny, exuberant 17-year-old of 1958 and the figure from 12 years later, bulkier but wiser. Both are part of World Cup legend. But, amazing as it might seem, the competition barely saw him at his very best. The Pele of 1962 was a force of nature, charging through opposing defences with the ball bouncing around him like some obedient puppy. One of his most impressive World Cup goals came in the opening game of that year's tournament, when he sliced right through the Mexico defence like an adult playing with small kids before shooting into the corner. But he was injured in the next game against Czechoslovakia, and could not regain fitness before the end of the tournament.

The skinny, exuberant 17-year-old of 1958 and the figure from 12 years later, bulkier but wiser. Both are part of World Cup legend. But, amazing as it might seem, the competition barely saw him at his very best

The man himself thought that the greatest performance of his career came later that year when Santos took on Benfica in the final of the Intercontinental Cup. After going down in Brazil by just 3-2, Benfica considered themselves favourites for the second leg back in Lisbon. But Pele ran riot and Santos opened up a five-goal lead before winning 5-2 in the end. One of the consequences of that display was that the Portuguese defenders were terrified of him in the next World Cup, in 1966, and kicked him mercilessly and brutally until he and Brazil were out of the competition, sending an embittered Pele into international retirement – a decision that, for the good of himself, Brazil, the sport and the World Cup, he was to rethink two years later.

In recent times there has been a foolish backlash against the status of Pele as an all-time great. It was, say the idiots, much easier back then. But there is something to bear in mind.

Neymar, with his two goals at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, has now equalled Pele as Brazil's all-time top scorer – with many more games and many more penalties. Much more

Opener...Pele heads in Brazil's first goal of the 1970 World Cup final

international football is played these days, and every other South American nation has a current or recently-retired player as their top marksman. The only exception is Pele with Brazil. If things really were so easy in his day, then they only seem to have been easy for him. Because he made them look easy with his talent and determination. Plus the fact that he was so much more than a goalscorer. He was the greatest. All those who have come after him are standing on the shoulders of a giant.

Genius...Pele deceives Uruguay goalkeeper Ladislao Mazurkiewicz

# 'It would be impossible for a player today to put together a career like mine again'

In tribute to Pele, we re-visit quotes from his interviews with Robert Alexander and Keir Radnedge, which were published in *World Soccer* in 1986 and 1992

**Your name is Edson Arantes do Nascimento. We know Brazilian players often have nicknames. Where did "Pele" come from?**
I was seven when I "met" Pele. I was born in a place called Tres Coracoes. Then when I was seven we came to Bauru. It was a small town but it was bigger than Tres Coracoes and the people thought they were a little more fancy. They started to tease us and the kids called me "Pele." I didn't know if I'd done something wrong but I didn't like the name so I started to fight the other boys. I told them: "My name is Edson." I was suspended from school for two days. My father had to go down to the school. They asked me: "Why were you fighting?" I said: "Because they call me Pele and I don't know what this name means. I don't like it." But it was too late. It stuck!

**Santos was your only professional club in Brazil. How did you join them?**
At 14 Santos went to play in Bauru and my father talked with their club president. They bought four players from Bauru's youth team and I was one of them. So at 15 I signed for Santos. At 16 I was in the national team. At 17...I was in Sweden. I see the film of the World Cup final again, with me crying at the end, and it seems like only yesterday.

**Was the 1958 World Cup victory in Sweden your best memory?**
Yes, some of my fondest memories are from the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. After we won I wanted to call my mother but I couldn't find a phone and I had to wait until the next day. Today the guys just pick up their cell phones and that's it. It's nice but it's too easy, really.

**What about winning the World Cup again in 1970 in Mexico? Was it easy with all of those great players?**
We did have outstanding technical players such as Rivelino, Tostao, Gerson and Jairzinho but, people don't realise, when we lost the ball only Jairzinho stayed up in attack. Everyone else fell back. That was the secret of our success: we played as a team. Everybody forgets about that because nowadays all you see of 1970 are the goals. You do not see the work behind them.

**What are your thoughts on the current Brazil national team?**
In the last 20 years we haven't had forwards like Garrincha, Pele, Tostao, Jairzinho. We have good players. The trouble is the coaches keep too much control over the players. We had our orders back in my day too, but the coach never had to tell us that when we had the ball we all went forward. We knew that. We did that automatically. When we played Italy in the final in 1970 we practised turning Carlos Alberto into a winger. We knew that [Giacinto] Facchetti would stay with Jairzinho. So Jairzinho moved away from his wing...and Carlos Alberto used the space to score a wonderful goal. Defenders should never be afraid to go forward. Not even the goalkeeper, with the ball at his feet. Like [Rene] Higuita! If the goalkeeper sees a chance to go for goal, yes, even he should go for it.

**Is it true a lot of great goalscorers like yourself liked playing in goal?**
Yes, I used to like playing in goal. At Santos and Brazil I was always the reserve goalkeeper in the team because, of course, in those days substitutes were not allowed, so one player always had to be ready to go in goal in case of emergencies. Three times as a pro with Santos I played in goal. When Johan Cruyff trained with us at the [New York] Cosmos he used to like to keep goal. In training I used to have a bet with him. We used to shoot five penalties each. I used to win. He wasn't a very good goalkeeper on AstroTurf. Maybe he was better on real grass!

**Apart from making a comeback to play in the United States, did you have any other offers earlier in your career?**
I had a lot of proposals to go to Italy, to Spain, to Mexico. But I was OK. I was making nice money with Santos, in Brazil. I was not interested in transferring abroad for a little more money. But now it's a different mentality. Society has been commercialised. This is life today. In football we have a short career. A player has 15 years to make their life. We are not like doctors or singers who can go on until they are 70. We are different. But even footballers cannot always think in material terms. They should remember the game.

**Has the game changed much? Do you still recognise the football you played?**
The game, out on the pitch, is almost the same. If you have good players, you get good football. But the big change is off the pitch. Players have so much pressure with the commercialisation of the game. The team have names of companies across their shirts so to lose is very bad because no company wants to be associated with a losing team. Television is the biggest factor, of course, in all that. The big companies and their money bring life into the game. But that makes life more complicated for the players. Some are into promotion more than football. They do not play with the heart – one club this year, another next year. In my day you played for, say, Sao Paulo. That was it. Now you play for Sao Paulo this year, Corinthians next year, then Palmeiras, Santos. In my day that was not so easy. You had one club in your heart. Now it's the money. The amount guys can earn now in two or three years is more than all the money I earned in nearly 30 years.

**Did you have many operations during your career?**
I never had an operation in my career. I had only three bad injuries. I had knee ligaments at the World Cup in England playing at Goodison Park against Portugal. Then another one, and once I broke my nose too. But I didn't even have an operation to have it fixed. Many times I refused an injection, because the effect of the anaesthetic is dangerous. You don't feel the injury so you play but you don't know what new damage you are doing. I never played when I was not fit enough to run.

**Did you ever play at Wembley?**
No, never – and nobody believes it. I mentioned it to Bobby Charlton and he could not believe it either. But it's true. I played in several places in England for Santos – at Sheffield Wednesday, at Aston Villa and other clubs and, of course, for Brazil at Goodison Park in the 1966 World Cup. But I never played at Wembley. The one time Brazil did play there during my career (in 1963) I must have been either injured or away somewhere with Santos. It's something I regret. To the Brazilian footballer, Wembley is special. I wish it had been possible...

**And what about life off the pitch now?**
Don't think I have abandoned football now because I am doing so many other things. I still love the game. I am planning to put aside time to train children in soccer. To prepare them for a football way of life and to make them aware and ready for it. To play well in football, like in any other way of life, you have to know how to live. The game has changed so much now. Today it is practically impossible to think of winning three World Cups. Or of winning two world club championships. I was fortunate to achieve both, but it could not be done again. It would be impossible for a player today to put together a career like mine again. But don't forget that there will always be one player who is better than the others in the eyes of the fans all over the world...

# eyewitness

Samindra Kunti reports

BRAZIL

## Saying goodbye to Pele

Amid a media scrum outside Santos' Vila Belmiro stadium, Antonio Lima, a brisk octogenarian and legend of the club, said that there would never be another Pele. "I doubt a player will emerge with the same skill set and playing style as Pele," said Lima. "That's going to be very difficult. He was everything. He was different from the start. From the age of 17, he trained with the senior team. He will serve as an example to all the boys that will trial at clubs or that want to follow in his footsteps at Santos."

Clodoaldo, another Santos legend and former Brazil international, remembered: "Pele liked perfection and he'd be on the back of his team-mates. The way I dealt with it was explaining we were just humans, and he was an extra-terrestrial!"

They were speaking from a position of privilege. The pair played alongside Pele in the 1960s, Santos' golden era when the club won both the Copa Libertadores and Intercontinental Cup twice. Clodoaldo was the youngest starter in Brazil's ▸

**Solemn...a supporter wearing a Brazil shirt outside Pele's wake**

**Long live the king... Pele's coffin is carried inside Santos' stadium**

famous 1970 team as well, and was pensive as he contemplated Pele's legacy and the loss of a personal friend. Lima's voice broke as he spoke of his kinship with Pele and the sporting glory they shared.

And so it was that, on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Santos, where for decades letters arrived addressed to "Pele, Santos, Brazil", that time stood still. Brazil, for the first time, was without the boy that had conquered the Vila Belmiro, stormed onto the world stage at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden and then cemented his place in the pantheon of the gods at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

To the tune of *Meu Legado* (My Legacy), a track Pele released in 2006, mourners and supporters – an estimated 230,000 in the space of 24 hours – filed past Pele's coffin. They often wore the shirt of Santos, sometimes the yellow of Brazil. There were flip-flops and shorts in a funeral procession that had distinct coastal features as well as tears and those kissing the grass of the field where Pele had won just about everything. The Vila Belmiro was dressed up with rows of number ten shirts and huge banners: "Long live the King" and "The only one to stop a war". The jumbotron showed a crown under a spotlight.

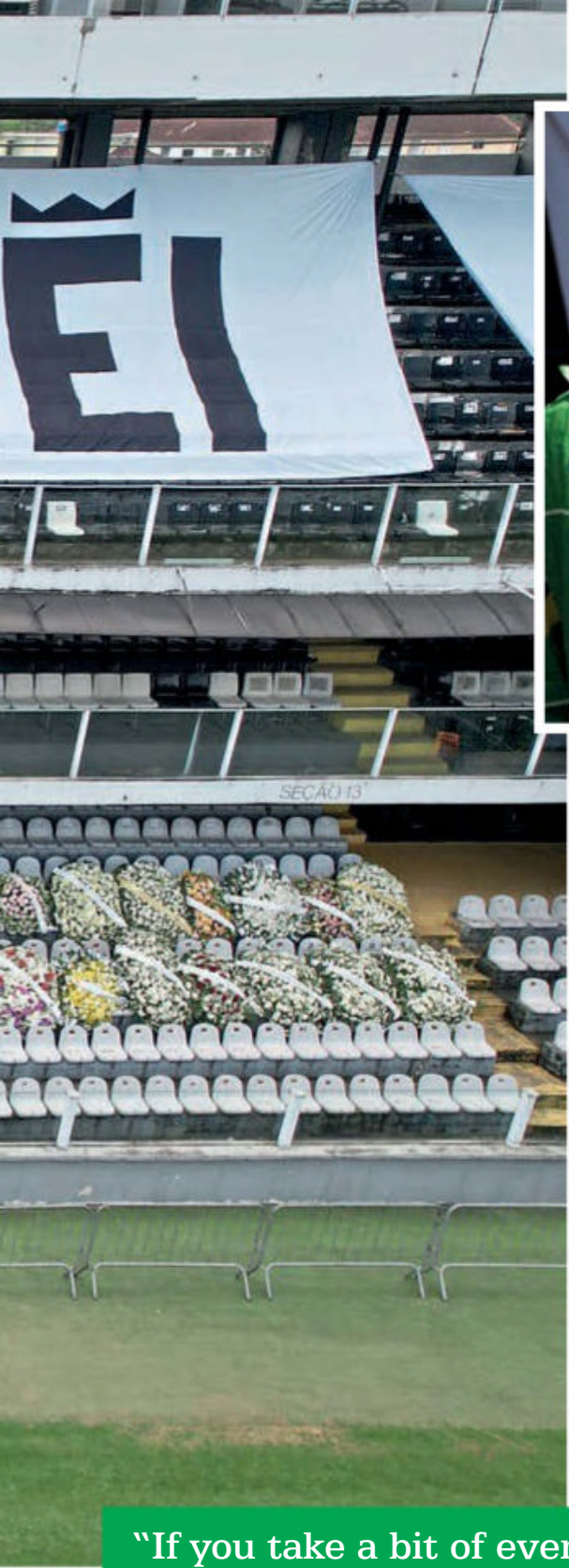
Some had come with memories of their own. Chugging a beer, a former Santos player said that he had seen Pele "illuminate play" in the stands of the Pacaembu stadium, Santos' occasional home. Former Flamengo president Luiz Veloso recalled the wonder of watching Pele in the 1969 World Cup qualifiers and Fabio, a Santos fan, claimed his grandfather had welcomed Pele multiple times at his restaurant in Bauru, where Pele took his first steps in the game. But all of them – phones in hand – came to witness and partake in history.

Vinicius, who had travelled 700 kilometres from Uberaba in Pele's native state Minas Gerais, argued that the legendary forward deserved all of this outpouring of love and admiration, because he was the ultimate football player and Brazil's greatest ambassador. Wearing a vintage New York Cosmos shirt, Fabio recalled how Pele had shouted: "Love, love, love" into the mic at the Giants Stadium.

Brazilians of all generations and all races were reciprocating that love, throwing flowers at the coffin, pointing fingers at the sky, chanting: "*Mil Gols*" (thousand goals) and referring to the Santos legend as "eternal".

That eternity will be important in the post-Pele era. Will future generations understand the importance of Pele for a young nation that was trying to find its way in the late 1950s? Will children around Brazil value the world's first superstar?

Clodoaldo said: "People who follow football know that young people who didn't see Pele play have doubts about him, and I am always being asked: 'Was he really that good?' I tell them: 'If you take a bit of every star you admire today, you might get close to being as good as Pele'."



**Respect...a fan watches on as Pele's funeral procession enters Santos' cemetery**

a kind word. Pele belonged to the world. Everyone felt that they had a legitimate claim to Pele. Many may have attributed him virtues that he simply did not possess.

It was no different in Santos: FIFA supremo Gianni Infantino – who took a selfie near Pele's open coffin – CONMEBOL boss Alejandro Dominguez, Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Ednaldo Rodrigues and local politicians all claimed their piece of Pele. Those who didn't were heavily criticised. Mauro Silva, an official of Sao Paulo's football federation, was the only player from the 1994 and 2002 World Cup-winning sides to attend the funeral procession.

"Pele is a citizen of the world, at the same level as Nelson Mandela or Mahatma Gandhi, but Brazilians don't know how to recognise that," said Jose Ferreira Neto, a former Brazil and Corinthians midfielder and now current TV presenter. "If they were World Cup winners and didn't come to see Pele, what can I say to them? At the very least it shows a lack of respect."

New Brazilian president Lula flew to Santos 48 hours after his inauguration. He was the last dignitary to bid farewell to Pele, arriving at the Vila Belmiro with his wife and a huge security detail. An ardent Corinthians supporter, Lula spent time with Pele on the bid for the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games. Lula's presence was hugely symbolic of Brazil at a crossroads, ushering in a new political age yet saying farewell to the King.

And so, it was time for the final journey, through the streets of Santos, along the beach, past the house of Pele's mother and then onto the cemetery, a stately building in the shadow of the Vila Belmiro. Here Edson was laid to rest, alongside Dondinho, his father, Zoca, one of his brothers, former Santos strike partner Coutinho and countless others, lesser-known citizens, whose names and stories will not echo into eternity.

One onlooker outside Santos' stadium, Lindomara, 69, claimed she had benefitted from a piece of land Pele donated to a social movement. "Pele hasn't died for me," she said. "He was the greatest football player, but he means the world to me."

> "If you take a bit of every star you admire today, you might get close to being as good as Pele"
>
> **Former Brazil and Santos midfielder Clodoaldo**

Fabio pointed out that it is of vital importance to preserve his memory – Brazilians have the duty to educate the next generations on what they have lost with the passing of Pele, a cultural icon, Brazil's representative around the world and football's apex artist.

Yet there are contradictions to the man. There is Edson – as his parents named him – a normal human being with flaws and shortcomings. Critics have always emphasised his lack of activism for the black cause, his silence about Brazil's military dictatorship, and his endless commercial endorsements. Then there is Pele, a semi-divine figure who enjoyed a status that prompted unreasonable public exposure and expectation. Kings, heads of state, presidents, rock stars, celebrities, supporters, hangers-on and just about everyone wanted a piece of the great man – a photo, a hug, a handshake, an autograph,

**Paying tribute...hundreds of fans gather outside Santos' Estadio Urbano Caldeira, aka the Vila Belmiro, to bid farewell to Pele**

Steve Menary reports

LITHUANIA

# New clubs, folded clubs and corruption

After years of Lithuanian football scraping along near the bottom of the European game, there is plenty of evidence of improvement. But a shadow is now looming over the horizon: few countries in Europe have lost as many clubs as Lithuania, where football has consistently struggled in the post-Soviet period.

Part of the problem is the dominance of basketball. Lithuania is ranked among the top ten countries in the world and has won Olympic and World Cup medals. In contrast, the football team has never qualified for a major tournament and the club game has been endemically weak.

Financial vulnerability and poor governance allowed criminal elements into the club game, which has been dogged by match-fixing and clubs routinely failing to see out a season.

Since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, 27 clubs have folded. In 2019, just five sides in the eight-team A-Lyga managed to see out the season, and the following campaign only six clubs were granted licences to play in the top flight.

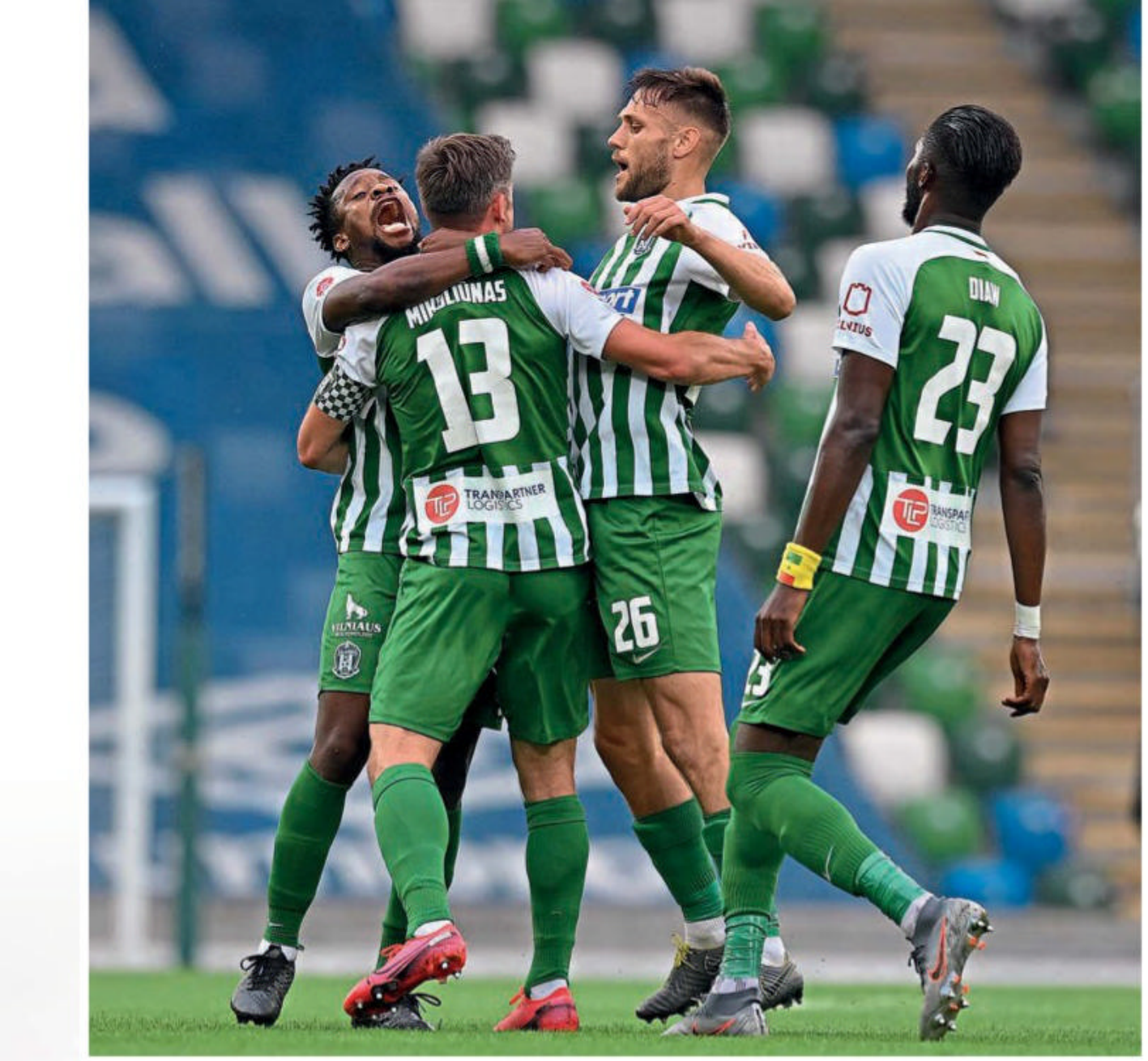
Since then, a corner has been turned and 2022 proved to be a watershed season for the Lithuanian club game. For the first time in years, all ten teams that were eligible to play in the A-Lyga were granted a licence after being able to meet the minimum budget requirement of €350,000.

That was a surprise, but not as surprising as FK Zalgiris becoming the first Lithuanian club to play in the group stage of UEFA competition after beating Swedish giants Malmo to secure a place in the Europa Conference League.

Traditionally the Baltic nation's biggest side, Zalgiris finished bottom of Group H but were far from disgraced. They beat Pyunik of Armenia 2-1 at home and secured draws away to Slovan Bratislava and Basel.

Zalgiris subsequently won a third consecutive title in November, romping

**Showdown...players of Hegelmann and FK Zalgiris line up ahead of the 2022 Lithuanian Cup final** *Credit: E. Kniezauskas*




## FOLDED LITHUANIAN CLUBS SINCE 1991

**Neris** *(1989-1991)*
**Vilija** *(1971-1991)*
**Zydrius** *(1994-1994)*
**Romar** *(1992-1995)*
**Sakalas Siauliai** *(1935-1995)*
**Politechnika Kaunas** *(1992-1998)*
**FK Sirijus Klaipeda** *(1973-1998)*
**Panerys Vilnius** *(1975-1999)*
**FK Lokomotyvas Vilnius** *(1951-2000)*
**FK Inkaras** *(1937-2003)*
**Vienybe Ukmerge** *(1962-2005)*
**FC Vilnius** *(2003-2008)*
**FK Kauno Jegeriai** *(1993-2009)*
**FK Vetra Vilnius** *(1997-2010)*
**FRK Atletas Kaunas** *(2005-2011)*
**FC Klaipeda** *(2005-2011)*
**FK Interas Visaginas** *(1979-2011)*
**REO Vilnius** *(2005-2012)*
**FBK Kaunas** *(1960-2012)*
**Dainava Alytus** *(1935-2014)*
**FK Ekranas Panevezys** *(1964-2014)*
**FC Siauliai** *(1995-2016)*
**FK Kruoja Pakruojis** *(2001-2016)*
**FK Klaipedos Granitas** *(2012-2016)*
**FC Stumbras** *(2013-2019)*
**FK Atlantas** *(1996-2020)*
**FK Palanga** *(2010-2020)*

**ABOVE: Lithuania's biggest club...Zalgiris in action in Europe**

home 21 points clear of local rivals Kauno Zalgiris, but standards in the club game are improving on and off the field.

In October 2022, PFA Lietuva became the first players association in the Baltic to be given observer status by global players union FIFPRO. The recognition was a further sign of the club game maturing.

On the field, new clubs are now sustaining a place in the A-Lyga and mounting a challenge. Panavezys only made their A-Lyga debut in 2019 but won the cup a year later, and in 2022 qualified for a third successive Europa Conference League appearance, where they will be joined in 2023-24 by one of the surprise packages of Lithuanian football, Kaunas-based Hegelmann.

**Since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, 27 clubs have folded. In 2019, just five sides in the eight-team A-Lyga managed to see out the season**

The team is owned by German transport and logistics company Hegelmann and started out in 2009 as a works side playing as Litauen (the German word for Lithuanian) at county level at the bottom of the country's pyramid.

Hegelmann Group also sponsors Formula 2 motor-racing, some tennis and owns FC Bruchsal, a sixth-tier side in their native Germany. But in the weak Lithuanian pyramid, Litauen always had a more realistic chance of success.

"In the beginning it was just employees playing for fun and the club competed for six years in the lowest division," explains Valdas Knyzelis, head of marketing at FC Hegelmann. "Then Dainius Sumauskas came in 2016 to run the operations for the club as the owner wanted to see the club getting better."

In 2018, the club won the third-tier II Lyga and Hegelmann Group began to take more interest. In 2020, Hegelmann finished second in the second tier I-Lyga and when the A-Lyga expanded to ten teams the following season the club were offered a place. Hegelmann began to focus their football sponsorship on Lithuania, where the club took the company's name.

In their debut season Hegelmann finished fifth. In 2022, the club went one place better and also reached their first final of the Lithuanian Cup, which Hegelmann was by now sponsoring.

Their opponents on October 16 were Zalgiris at the newly-renovated Darius and Girenas Stadium. The original Darius and Girenas Stadium was ill-suited to football, but after a €43 million redevelopment led by the local council the new ground

is one of the best in the Baltic. The cup final was the opening event and a 15,000-capacity crowd came to see if Hegelmann could upset Zalgiris.

Nigerian Samuel Odeyobo equalised in stoppage-time, but Austrian defender Mario Pavelic scored the winner for Zalgiris in the second half of extra-time. A win would have guaranteed Hegelmann a spot in Europe, but they still claimed a Europa Conference League place anyway by finishing fourth in the league, thanks to a 2-2 draw with fifth-placed Riteriai on the final day.

**ABOVE: Team photo... Hegelmann players ahead of the cup final**
*Credit: E. Zaldaris*

**BELOW: Newly developed...the Darius and Girenas Stadium**
*Credit: E. Zaldaris*

The 2023 season looks likely to be again dominated by Zalgiris, whose €2m budget was already the biggest in the league and will have doubled thanks to UEFA money from their 2022-23 Europa Conference League qualification.

Money equals success in Lithuania, where the biggest budget generally means buying the best players. Knyzelis adds: "In Lithuania, you can buy your place in the league if you invest and meet all the regulations and licencing."

The gap between Zalgiris and the rest of the league looks likely to widen but there is competition developing between the teams behind. "The five teams behind Zalgiris [Kauno Zalgiris, Panevezys, Hegelmann, Riterai and Suduva] are on the same level," says Oliver Schlegl, a German football agent and consultant, who has worked as an advisor for Hegelmann. "Siauliai only play with locals and are not bad; [Banga and Dziugas] are not strong and Jonava was the biggest joke in the Baltic this year."

Both Dziugas and Jonava have been relegated and few sides in the A-Lyga will mourn the loss of the latter, who collected a mere three points in 36 games, failed to win a single game and conceded a staggering 103 goals, ending with a goal difference of -91.

Jonava also regularly attracted attention for suspicious betting on their matches, and last August the Lithuanian Football Federation brought charges against four of the club's players for alleged match-fixing.

In October, Jonava general manager Vaidas Vaskevicius alerted the LFF to concerns ahead of a game that was subsequently delayed by 20 minutes before belatedly starting. So far, no action has been taken and the rest of the A-Lyga will be relieved that Jonava have been relegated.

Two new institutions, the Financial Crime Investigation Unit and the Special Investigation Service, were set up to tackle the problem, but prosecutions are hard to secure. A new bill is being developed to aid the fight but Lithuania's government believes that the LFF is not fit to tackle this problem or even run the game in the country.

In summer 2022, the chairman of the Lithuanian parliamentary Committee on Budget & Finance, said: "We need UEFA's direct management. Or, with UEFA's blessing, we need the Lithuanian government to take action and appoint a temporary regulator. A UEFA-appointed representative should also be considered."

> Money equals success in Lithuania, where the biggest budget generally means buying the best players

With elections due in 2024, the LFF dismissed the call as "political PR", but there is a very real problem. In September Lithuania's police department said that four members of the federation had previously committed "criminal acts" but that those convictions had now lapsed.

The bloated, fractured structure of the LFF is part of the problem, with so many different elements able to put members forward to the executive committee, even if they come from a region where football is relatively weak.

Reforming those statutes has proved insurmountable, with people and organisations unwillingly to give up influence. This deterred reformers such as Edvinas Eimontas, who was a director and then president of the LFF for five years before leaving in exasperation in 2017.

Football was poorly represented at the Lithuanian Sports University's annual forum on December 1, which had representatives from across the sports sector including Linas Obcarskas, vice-minister for sport at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Part of the reason was the increasingly heated climate around the LFF after 82 Lithuanian members of parliament approved direct management of the federation in September 2022.

UEFA has refused to comment on the situation in Lithuania and direct management seems unlikely, but both the European body and FIFA have had some input in helping the LFF reform its statutes.

With Zalgiris given a massive financial boost just as most clubs in Lithuania were showing they could operate coherently, the country needs a federation to pull the game together not drive it apart again.

**Good support...fans of Hegelmann cheer on their team during the Lithuanian Cup final** *Credit: E. Zaldaris*

Headliners

# Juventus

## Investigation into alleged financial irregularities could cost club dear

It could hardly have come at a worse time. The most recent scandal to hit Italian football, involving the country's most successful and arguably best-known club, Juventus, came right in the middle of the Qatar World Cup.

Bad enough that Italian fans were suffering the pain and ignominy of watching a second consecutive World Cup that steamed ahead without them; That was traumatic enough. What seemed bitterly ironic was that at the very moment the rest of the world was enjoying the biggest football show on Earth in Qatar, Italy was coming to terms with yet another scandal of huge significance.

The Italian collective mind immediately went back 16 years to the 2006 World Cup win of the Marcello Lippi-coached Italy in Germany. That triumph had almost been scuppered by the infamous *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal – also involving Juventus – that had broken right on the eve of the tournament.

It says much about the seriousness of this latest investigation that lawyer Mattia Grassani, an expert on sports-related legislation, described it thus on state radio *Rai1*: "This is the most significant and serious investigation that Juventus have suffered in all their history, perhaps even more serious than *Calciopoli*. The nature of the wrongdoing that they're accused of is without precedent."

At the time of writing, Juventus are under investigation from at least four different, powerful institutions: the Italian state judiciary; the Italian Stock Market regulatory authority (CONSOB); the Italian Football Federation (FIGC); and UEFA's Club Financial Control Body.

There was an indication, as far back as autumn 2021, that there might be trouble brewing at Juventus when the club informed a shareholders' public assembly that CONSOB had begun an "inspection" earlier that year relating to the club's handling of monies derived from its "players rights", better known in Italian football jargon as the "*plusvalenza*". In other words, the capital gains and losses derived from the sale of the players' registration rights to another club, with reference to three seasons: 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21.

All of this seemed irrelevant when the FIGC's prosecutor in April last year absolved all 11 clubs and 59 club directors, including Juventus and its club president Andrea Agnelli, from alleged wrongdoing in relation to the *plusvalenza* question. However, the whole issue burst onto the front pages again at the end of November when the entire Juventus board resigned. In a communiqué, the club explained: "Given the importance and relevance of the pending legal and technical-accountancy issues, the members of the board have deemed it in the best interests of the club for it to appoint a new board to confront all these issues."

Three days later, 12 people, including Agnelli, club vice-president and former Juve great Pavel Nedved, and CEO Maurizio Arrivabene, were formally summoned by the Turin state prosecutor. At the time of writing, no court date has been set for the case.

In a statement, the club proclaimed its total innocence: "Juventus FC remains convinced that it has always acted correctly and intends to assert its reasons and defend its corporate, economic and sporting interests in all forums."

At the heart of the Turin magistrates' investigation, codenamed "*Prisma*", are two fundamental enquiries. One is into the *plusvalenza* question, namely that Juventus and other clubs allegedly entered into "agreements" with regard to player transfers whereby the value of a player was falsely exaggerated for accountancy purposes.

**Uncertain future ...Juventus**

> "The nature of the wrongdoing that they're accused of is without precedent"
>
> Lawyer Mattia Grassani

That this investigation could prove to be an earthquake, not just for Juventus but for Italian football as a whole because of the involvement of a number of different clubs, was partially confirmed by the new Italian sports minister Andrea Abodi, a former head of Serie B from 2010 to 2017. Commenting on the investigation, he said in early December: "We need to know as soon as we can what exactly has happened and then take decisions that will restore credibility to the whole system, on the basis of fair play."

Opponents of Agnelli wasted little time in celebrating the news. La Liga president Javier Tebas tweeted: "Dear Andrea Agnelli, you spent so many years 'manipulating' balance sheets, valuations, documents, to 'deceive' public authorities, sports, shareholders, fans...your resignation is great news."

The other fundamental

**Resignations... (from left to right): Maurizio Arrivabene, Pavel Nedved and Andrea Agnelli**

question raised by the enquiry concerns allegations of off-the-books payments made to the Juventus players at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. A terrific "feel good" story at the time, in which, for the good of the club at a dramatic moment of reduced income, Juve's millionaire footballers agreed to forgo their pay. This has since been contradicted by wiretaps, and hundreds of them, published by the Italian media. It raises questions as to whether salaries were indeed sacrificed during the pandemic or simply deferred.

That incident remains one of the many serious questions raised by the enquiry. What exactly will the UEFA, CONSOB and the Italian Football Federation investigations conclude? Could Juventus be fined, or perhaps even relegated by the FIGC? One thing for sure is that this is not how the Agnelli automobile dynasty, once owners of FIAT but now partners in Stellantis, imagined they would be entering the year that marks the 100th anniversary of their ownership of arguably Italy's greatest football club. *Che disastro.*

*Paddy Agnew*

# Garang Kuol

## Can the Australian become "the next Harry Kewell" in the Premier League?

There have been so many talented young kids from Down Under who've been lumbered with the tag of "the next Harry Kewell", it's a wonder the former Liverpool winger, arguably the greatest player Australia has ever produced, doesn't trademark it.

Yet most have found the burden too heavy to bear.

Nathan Burns is one example. He exploded onto the scene with Adelaide United back in 2006, when Kewell was still playing. He was quick, tricky and could score goals, but a move to AEK Athens in 2008 didn't work out, and a subsequent transfer to Incheon United was similarly unsuccessful. Five years later, he was back in the A-League.

It's a familiar story. Daniel Arzani – the last "next Kewell" – dazzled A-League fans while with Melbourne City in 2018, earning a move to the parent club (Manchester City) and a spot in Bert van Marwijk's Socceroos squad at the World Cup in Russia. But a loan move to Celtic ended in serious injury, and three loans later (Utrecht, AGF Aarhus and Lommel) he was boarding the flight back home to start again, this time with Macarthur FC.

Statistics show that almost 80 per cent of Aussies heading overseas are back within two years, most having failed to make the grade.

So, the news that Garang Kuol had signed for Newcastle United was met with mixed reviews in Australia. Not that supporters think he is shooting above his station. On the contrary, Kuol's talents have lit up the domestic league and, like Arzani in 2018, booked him a seat on the plane to the World Cup. Australians are genuinely excited that a rare gem has been unearthed.

Kuol is blessed with pace, a sublime touch and an eye for goal uncommon in one so young. His strike for Central Coast Mariners against Macarthur was typical of a gifted footballer. Plucking a cross from Jacob Farrell out of the air, he killed the ball instantly, before manoeuvring into position to fire into the roof of the net from the tightest of angles. It drew gasps from the gallery, and probably cemented his place in Graham Arnold's squad for Qatar.

Born to a refugee family, Kuol is extremely level-headed, perhaps due to his unusual upbringing. His family fled the war in South Sudan to settle in Melbourne via Egypt, where his parents work as dry cleaners. His close-knit network includes his elder brother, Alou, currently making his way in Europe with Stuttgart, and who scored an outrageous scorpion-kick goal for the Australian Under-23 side against Iraq in June.

Another of his brothers, Kuol Kuol, acts as his advisor, and it is believed that it was he who pushed for Garang's move to England rather than joining fellow sibling Alou at Stuttgart.

Yet Garang only started his first senior game of football after the World Cup. For all his talents, his physique will need work to make him durable enough for Premier League football. A loan move beckons – rumoured to be Scottish side Hearts – which is a path that has seen so many Australians lose their way and end up on the plane back home.

That would be a pity. As Barcelona found out in their friendly against the A-League All Stars, and as Argentina so nearly discovered to their cost at the World Cup – when only a desperate block from Emiliano Martinez denied him a late equaliser – Kuol has no fear, and plenty of ability to back up his confidence. If Newcastle look after him, they could have a real gem on their hands; perhaps even, with a bit of luck, the next Harry Kewell.

If not, Australian fans can console themselves with the fact that the family production line still has plenty more in the pipeline. Teng Kuol is already at Central Coast Mariners, and there are three other younger siblings too.

*Simon Hill*

**World Cup...Kuol in action in Qatar**

# Venezuela

## South America's whipping boys have their sights set on the 2026 World Cup

All the success that Argentina have had under head coach Lionel Scaloni in recent years – from lifting the Copa America trophy in 2021, to their record-breaking 36-match unbeaten run and historic World Cup triumph in Qatar – can, in a small way, be attributed to the work of Venezuela coach Jose Pekerman. The current *Albiceleste* boss was one of many players to emerge under Pekerman's youth reforms of the Argentine game in the 1990s, as he led the Under-20 side to three World Cup victories. Now, Pekerman is attempting to replicate that impact on the Venezuelan game.

The septuagenarian Argentine coach took charge of Venezuela, the traditional whipping boys of the region, in 2021. In the '90s, they had an infamous reputation – they were "the San Marino of South America", routinely beaten by the region's powerhouses with mammoth scores.

That reputation has been somewhat dispelled now, even if the last qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup were a major disappointment. Having started with genuine belief and ambition of reaching the global finals for the first time, the wheels quickly came off. They took four matches to get their first points on the board, before losing to Bolivia in their next game. Everything went wrong, and their dependency on striker Salomon Rondon, once of West Bromwich Albion, was exposed: with the pandemic and through injuries, he rarely featured in the qualifiers, playing just a third of the matches. They finished bottom of the ten-team table with only ten points.

It was all the more disheartening because Venezuelan football has progressed in the last two decades. They hosted the 2007 Copa America when matches were infamously shifted away from the capital Caracas because president Hugo Chavez feared protests in the stands. The hosts reached the last eight only to fall at the hands of Uruguay, 4-1. Juan Arango was the team's star, a rare player who plied his trade in Europe with Mallorca and then later Borussia Monchengladbach.

Four years later, Venezuela went one better, reaching the semi-finals in Argentina, their greatest Copa America achievement to date. In 2017, Venezuela reached the final of the Under-20 World Cup, losing to England. That generation didn't carry the country to Qatar, but some players are part of the national team, including goalkeeper Wuilker Farinez.

Today, Venezuela's dream is to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, which will be played across three host nations (United States, Canada and Mexico) in a 48-team format for the first time. This format raises the prospects of countries around the world – on top of those already on the brink like Mali and Vietnam – of debuting in four years' time. Even countries that in the past played on the fringes of the global game, like Venezuela, are hopeful.

**2026 World Cup hopefuls...Venezuela**

> Today, Venezuela's dream is to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, which will be played across three host nations in a 48-team format for the first time

Pekerman's arrival is a sign that Venezuela are thinking about the long term. His strength is his development of young players – as he proved with the youth structure that he put in place in his home country. His idea was to use the youth sides to develop players who are good enough to play in global football – something that Uruguay later copied under Oscar Washington Tabarez. Pekerman's approach is always holistic: a player is more than simply an equation of fitness and technique – his human side needs to be nourished as well.

Where he struggles is in navigating the major matches. Cases in point are Argentina (Germany in the quarter-finals of the 2006 World Cup) and Colombia (England in the round of 16 of the 2018 World Cup). He will need to get some results against the bigger sides in South America to clinch one of the seven possible tickets allocated for South America in 2026.

Recently, Venezuela played a string of friendlies against diverse opponents – Iceland, UAE, Panama, Malta and Syria. Results were mixed, but they defeated World Cup finalists Saudi Arabia 1-0.

"For Venezuela, everything is a gain," Pekerman said after a 1-0 defeat to Iceland. "We are on the right path for the 2026 qualifiers and this team can improve." If his prophecy rings true, the Venezuelans could well make their debut at the next World Cup.

*Samindra Kunti*

# Casa Pia

## Lisbon minnows taking the Portuguese league by storm

Back in the top flight after an 83-year absence, unable to play at their home stadium and forced to sell their star player in the summer, the widespread expectation was that Casa Pia would struggle to survive in Portugal's Primeira Liga in 2022-23. Yet when the season was interrupted for the World Cup, the Lisbon minnows were sensationally riding high in fifth place after winning seven of their first 13 Primeira Liga matches.

Casa Pia is a unique football club in that it is rooted in a national institution rather than a geographical location. The orphanage of the same name was founded in 1780 to give children without parents or from troubled families a solid educational grounding. The institution viewed sports as an integral part of education, and it enthusiastically adopted an exciting new game brought to Portugal by the British in the late 19th century: football.

So successful was the team that when the sport began to take hold in the country, and a new team called Benfica was founded in the Portuguese capital, several of Casa Pia's best players were poached. Casa Pia therefore played a key role in the origin of one of Europe's biggest clubs, who would go on to become continental champions.

Casa Pia themselves continued to have a competitive team and were part of the national championship in the 1938-39 season, but were relegated. Although a regular presence in the leagues just below the first division, the club would have to wait more than eight decades to return to the top flight.

Like all teams outside of the major clubs in Portugal, Casa Pia have struggled to be financially viable in recent years. It received a boost in 2020, though, when American investor Robert Platek – who is also involved in Spezia (Italy) and Sonderjysk Elitesport (Denmark) – came on board with the project.

This is no story of big money buying success however. The club continues to run a very tight ship, relying on smart decision-making, intelligent recruitment in key positions and clever squad building. The sale of Jota Silva, their star player in their promotion season, to Vitoria Guimaraes, without any drop-off in results is a prime example of good housekeeping.

**Shrewd signing... Casa Pia's Saviour Godwin celebrates**

"Clubs of this dimension in Portugal need to increase the value of their footballers and then make some player sales," says sporting director Diogo Boa Alma. "We think first and foremost about the collective, because if we are in good shape collectively, each player individually will increase in value, and then we also want to help these professionals who serve Casa Pia well reach higher levels, which leaves space for other players to come in the following year."

Casa Pia's transfer activity fully vindicates Boa Alma's words. In Jota's absence, flying Nigerian winger Saviour Godwin has taken on the mantel of the team's chief creator. The lightning-fast Nigerian was snapped up in 2020 when his Belgian club, Roeselare, ran into financial difficulties. He has been exceptional and is a perfect fit for the counter-attacking game expertly implemented by highly-rated young coach Filipe Martins. Thanks to Martins' tactical knowhow, he has moulded the squad into a team that is clearly far stronger than the sum of its parts.

> Casa Pia is a unique football club in that it is rooted in a national institution rather than a geographical location

Another example of Casa Pia's impressive scouting network and eye for an opportunity is the capture of Japanese attacking midfielder Takahiro Kunimoto, another star performer this season. After winning two league titles and making a big name for himself at Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors in South Korea, Kunimoto's contract was reportedly terminated due to drink driving charges. Casa Pia jumped in to snap up a calibre of player who would normally be out of their reach.

Arguably, though, the most notable achievement in a memorable season so far for Casa Pia is how they have competed with Portugal's top clubs. A narrow defeat to runaway leaders Benfica and a well-deserved victory at Braga were particularly eye-catching displays. Although playing their "home" matches at the Jamor national stadium while their Pina Manique home is being renovated, Casa Pia are in the mix for qualification for European football despite having a squad worth a fraction of the value of their rivals.

Is it realistic for Casa Pia to remain in the leading pack? "Our objective is clearly to stay in the Primeira Liga," says Boa Alma. "We need to create infrastructures, build the new stadium, improve the training facilities. These are all objectives so that in a few years we can fight to qualify for the European competitions, although of course we will try to finish as high as possible this year."

Everything points towards the Geese continuing to fly.

*Tom Kundert*

# BRING IT ON

Newcastle United's record signing is facing the biggest challenge of his career. But, as his former coaches point out, the Sweden striker has taken on plenty already…

**Words:** Harry De Cosemo

**Biggest challenge yet ...Isak celebrating a goal for Newcastle**

Alexander Isak is no stranger to proving himself, but he is facing arguably his biggest challenge yet. At Newcastle United, for whom he became the record signing last summer – spearheading the new Saudi Arabian-funded project – there is a mix of curiosity and anticipation about the impact the 23-year-old Sweden striker could make.

Initially, he hit the ground running with a stunning debut goal against Liverpool at Anfield and a penalty in a home draw with Bournemouth. But teething problems were evident, too, as he strove to fit into Eddie Howe's system, before picking up a thigh injury on international duty that has kept him out since September.

He returned to fitness after the World Cup break with Newcastle mounting an unlikely Champions League challenge, and the pressure is on to show exactly why the club spent £63 million to lure him from Real Sociedad. In essence, he has to reintroduce himself.

Fortunately, reintroduction has been a key theme of his career to date.

Isak had a comfortable life, growing up just outside the Swedish capital city of Stockholm with a supportive but grounded family. His parents settled in Sweden after emigrating from Eritrea in the 1980s.

At his first club AIK in his homeland, he was a teenage prodigy, making his debut and scoring his first goal aged 16. Although that increased the spotlight on him, his humble nature allowed him to stay focused. His father was particularly crucial to affording him freedom growing up.

Comparisons to Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Sweden's footballing superstar, were inevitable but misplaced and not something Isak has taken kindly to.

"People love to compare," Swedish football journalist Noa Bachner tells *World Soccer*. "It was immediate. They are incredibly different characters; they both grew up in suburbs but Zlatan was near Malmo and there is nothing similar between there and Stockholm. There are no similarities except the fact they

**Starting out...Isak in action for Borussia Dortmund in 2017**

were teenagers when they broke through."

It wasn't long before he was poached by Borussia Dortmund, the German club with a history of developing and profiting from the most highly-rated talent around, in 2017.

Despite an impressive return of five goals in 12 games over two years for their reserve side, he found himself struggling against competition from the likes of Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to feature for the first team and wasn't given opportunities by four different managers: Thomas Tuchel, Peter Bosz, Peter Stoger and Lucien Favre.

Only Favre made any real attempt to rectify the situation, sending Isak to work closely with Dortmund II coach Jan Siewert, but by then it was too late.

"He was alone abroad for the first time. At his age it wasn't easy for him," Siewert says. "We met at a coffee bar because I didn't know much about him. I'd observed him in the first team but there must have been a reason he wasn't playing. He was a shy guy, very reserved. I showed him two pictures of himself, one of him with Sweden laughing just after he scored, and the other of him sitting on the bench at Dortmund. I asked him what the difference was and, by realising that I was helping him, he opened up.

"He is smart. He knew his skills, but lacked confidence. I told him we would put him in positions to score but we needed him to get on with our players. That conversation was an icebreaker; he began to score goals, his physique changed and he gained confidence.

"He just needed more time than he got. Jadon [Sancho] was the same, he needed time in my team to understand the German way of playing. It was easy to think Alex had an attitude problem; he didn't, he was sensitive. Technically, he could compete, but not at the level of the Champions League at that time. I don't know why.

"He had four managers and only one sent him to me. If he started at my team, would it have been different? I think so, but I can't prove that."

The turning point for Isak came away from Germany, during a loan spell at Dutch club Willem II in 2019, where he scored 13 goals in just 16 Eredivisie games.

A move to Real Sociedad followed and that was where he took that next step and found the path to fulfilling his potential again.

There were challenges in San Sebastian, too. Following a debut season that yielded 16 goals in all comps – including seven in the Copa del Rey as *La Real* lifted their first trophy since 1987 – and another 17 in La Liga a year later, his 2021-22 campaign was more difficult. He only scored six times in the league during his third season, so it was something of a surprise when he was thrust into

Impact...Isak celebrates scoring at the Bernabeu in the Copa del Rey

the role of poster boy for a Newcastle side who are looking to join the elite.

The assumption that the Magpies would throw money at big names with big egos has not come to pass. Howe and his recruitment team have built a team of strong characters with a down-to-earth nature that suits Isak perfectly.

"Something happened with Isak at Dortmund," Bachner adds. "He was really questioned and he came through that because of that spell in the Netherlands.

> **"It was easy to think Alex had an attitude problem; he didn't, he was sensitive"**
> **Former Borussia Dortmund II coach Jan Siewert**

"What stands out about him is he has always taken steps to remember who he is and keep in touch with that. He learnt Spanish as a second language in school, so when he moved to Real Sociedad, he called his old teacher and recounted a trip to Barcelona he took with his class. It is hard to see him getting swept up in the superstar universe.

"But he is at a place in his career where he needs this to work out, it is a really important point. He's had his big move to Newcastle after some tough moments; his debut was typical, unfazed by everything in that moment. He plays his own game.

"You'd hope his calm approach to it leads him to find his way again, but that is a weakness and a strength. If he doesn't score, he sees it as a clean slate for the next game, but at times you feel he'd be better off demanding more from himself."

Siewert understands that criticism, but believes it is only a perception.

"He is very introverted and his body language makes people think certain things, but he is very self-critical. If he feels comfortable, and he needs that comfort zone to be the Alex he can be, he can show himself. When he went back into the first team, he scored three games later and sent me a message; that is what he is about. Everybody expects football players to be the tough guy, but they are all different.

"He has the quality and he demands a lot from himself, even if he doesn't show it."

One of the problems facing Isak is just how much Newcastle have excelled without him, with the likes of Bruno Guimaraes, Miguel Almiron and Callum Wilson in superb form. The latter, in particular, earned a World Cup call-up after scoring six goals before the mid-season break, and will be Isak's main rival for a starting spot.

"He is a typical centre-forward of his generation," says Bachner. "He's not a traditional number nine, the sort that barely exists anymore. Isak likes to be involved in build-up play; he can score in various ways. He wants to be close to goal and is not interested in crossing.

"He will have the aim of taking Wilson out as a number nine. He has more to his game than Wilson does, but if Howe can fit him in and cut out the dry spells of goals, he will take that spot."

"He finds spaces and gaps where there is very little time to shoot and is extremely clinical and ruthless," Siewert adds.

"He would be very good with a second striker or number ten behind him, because he prefers to be close to goal than coming in from wide. He has the smell of a striker; his goal against Liverpool sums him up. He put it in the top corner and it didn't look like it took much effort because he exploited the space."

There have been difficult moments in Isak's career that are typical of a player his age, but Bachner believes context is key, after a lack of time in Dortmund and a difficult end to life at Real Sociedad.

"Newcastle are buying into his potential; he hasn't played to the level of someone worth that money. If he had, he'd have signed for a Champions League club.

"But you'd still bank on him. The fact he didn't score much last season is on him, but Sociedad changed their system. It probably served them well as a team, but cost them Isak's goals because he was not playing the same role."

If Isak's story has proven anything, it is that the rise to the top is not always straightforward. He is the wonderkid who has suffered setbacks – the latest being his injury at Newcastle – but he has the temperament, mentality and quality to become a vital player in their journey towards the elite.

Premier League debut...Isak at Anfield

WorldSoccer

# NEXT MONTH

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO...

## *The Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League knockout stages*

- ARABIAN GULF CUP REVIEW
- CHAN & AFF 2022 REVIEWS
- 2023 CONCACAF CL KICK-OFF

**ON SALE FEBRUARY 17**

2022 AWARDS RESULTS

# World Soccer Awards 2022

THE RESULTS OF OUR 41ST ANNUAL AWARDS – AND THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED SHAPE THE GAME OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

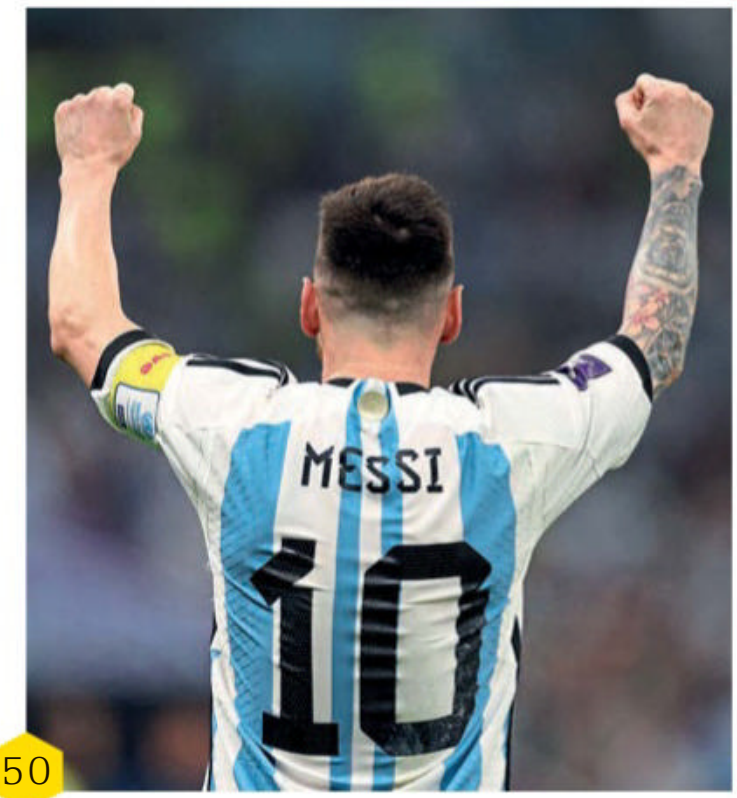

PLAYER

COACH/TEAM

WOMEN

PEOPLE

OBITUARIES


50

52

57

54

63

# KING LEO

Lionel Messi is named *World Soccer*'s Player of the Year for a record sixth time, while Lionel Scaloni and Argentina complete a clean sweep for *La Albiceleste*

Football – especially during World Cups – is often a swirl of competing narratives all bidding to become dominant while frequently colliding with each other. Qatar 2022 had more than most: would Cristiano Ronaldo put the perfect finishing touch to his stellar career? Could Brazil return to the top of the pantheon 20 years after their fifth and last success? Or would this finally be England's year, as the FA targeted over a decade ago?

In the end, it was the two most compelling story arcs that met in the final, with the spotlight firmly on the tournament's two main protagonists: Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe. One looking to end his career by ending all debates around his status as the game's greatest of all time and collect the one honour that had eluded him; the other seeking to prove that he also belonged in such conversations by inspiring his team to back-to-back World Cup wins before his 24th birthday.

AFA
FIFA
The Fluid

Casting a shadow over this debate were two titans: Diego Maradona, the man who inspired Argentina to the trophy in 1986 and who Messi has been compared to ever since his emergence, and Pele, the only other player before Mbappe to have such an impact at the World Cup at such a young age.

In Qatar's showpiece event, both players more than delivered, a rare case of two superstars absolutely living up to the pre-match hype and justifying all the hyperbole surrounding them.

Yet the difference between one fulfilling their destiny and the other looking on inconsolably ultimately came down to small details beyond their control. What if Randal Kolo Muani had found the bottom corner instead

**Messi's name will, hereafter, be forever associated with the year 2022**

of Emiliano Martinez's outstretched ankle in the dying seconds of extra-time? What if Aurelien Tchouameni had faced down Martinez's antics in the shootout and slotted his penalty home instead of dragging it wide? And what if Hugo Lloris had stood up to a rusty Paulo Dybala's unconvincing strike instead of diving out of the way?

Those details were the difference between Messi's fairy-tale finish and a tragic ending; between Mbappe's coronation as the next king of world football and his relegation to a tier below Leo. And, ultimately, between Messi winning the 2022 *World Soccer* World Player of the Year award and Mbappe claiming it instead.

Mbappe will at least have the chance to add to his legend in four years' time – unlike his compatriot Karim Benzema. In 2018, the Real Madrid striker was an outcast as France lifted the World Cup in Russia. This time, when international redemption was within his grasp in Qatar, he was cruelly ruled out by injury on the eve of the tournament. His winning of the Ballon d'Or award in October now seems like a lifetime ago.

Benzema would be entitled to feel that our panel have short memories. After all, for much of 2022 he was the world's outstanding performer, instrumental in firing Real Madrid to their 14th Champions League crown with telling contributions in every round of the knockout phase.

**World champions... Argentina players celebrate with the World Cup trophy**

## Previous World Player of the Year winners

| 1980s | 1990s | 2000s | 2010s |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1982 Paolo Rossi** | **1990 Lothar Matthaus** | **2000 Luis Figo** | **2010 Xavi** |
| *Juventus & Italy* | *Internazionale & West Germany* | *Barcelona/Real Madrid & Portugal* | *Barcelona & Spain* |
| **1983 Zico** | **1991 Jean-Pierre Papin** | **2001 Michael Owen** | **2011 Lionel Messi** |
| *Udinese & Brazil* | *Marseille & France* | *Liverpool & England* | *Barcelona & Argentina* |
| **1984 Michel Platini** | **1992 Marco van Basten** | **2002 Ronaldo** | **2012 Lionel Messi** |
| *Juventus & France* | *Milan & Netherlands* | *Internazionale/Real Madrid & Brazil* | *Barcelona & Argentina* |
| **1985 Michel Platini** | **1993 Roberto Baggio** | **2003 Pavel Nedved** | **2013 Cristiano Ronaldo** |
| *Juventus & France* | *Juventus & Italy* | *Juventus & Czech Republic* | *Real Madrid & Portugal* |
| **1986 Diego Maradona** | **1994 Paolo Maldini** | **2004 Ronaldinho** | **2014 Cristiano Ronaldo** |
| *Napoli & Argentina* | *Milan & Italy* | *Barcelona & Brazil* | *Real Madrid & Portugal* |
| **1987 Ruud Gullit** | **1995 Gianluca Vialli** | **2005 Ronaldinho** | **2015 Lionel Messi** |
| *PSV/Milan & Netherlands* | *Juventus & Italy* | *Barcelona & Brazil* | *Barcelona & Argentina* |
| **1988 Marco van Basten** | **1996 Ronaldo** | **2006 Fabio Cannavaro** | **2016 Cristiano Ronaldo** |
| *Milan & Netherlands* | *PSV/Barcelona & Brazil* | *Juventus/Real Madrid & Italy* | *Real Madrid & Portugal* |
| **1989 Ruud Gullit** | **1997 Ronaldo** | **2007 Kaka** | **2017 Cristiano Ronaldo** |
| *Milan & Netherlands* | *Barcelona/Internazionale & Brazil* | *Milan & Brazil* | *Real Madrid & Portugal* |
| | **1998 Zinedine Zidane** | **2008 Cristiano Ronaldo** | **2018 Luka Modric** |
| | *Juventus & France* | *Manchester United & Portugal* | *Real Madrid & Croatia* |
| | **1999 Rivaldo** | **2009 Lionel Messi** | **2019 Lionel Messi** |
| | *Barcelona & Brazil* | *Barcelona & Argentina* | *Barcelona & Argentina* |

His club coach, Carlo Ancelotti, is also unfortunate to finish third in our poll of managers. The Italian masterminded his fourth Champions League triumph (the first manager do so) and guided Madrid to La Liga glory – only the third time in the club's history that they've won the European and Spanish crowns in the same season.

Yet Ancelotti and Benzema's relegation down the podium is a reminder that in the eyes of many, while the Champions League may legitimately claim to be the highest competitive level of modern football, the World Cup remains the pinnacle of the sport, where legends are written and legacies are defined.

Messi's name will, hereafter, be forever associated with the year 2022 – just as Pele is with 1970, Maradona with 1986 and Zinedine Zidane with 1998. And that's why he's a worthy winner of our latest award.

*Jamie Evans*

## 2020s

| | |
|---|---|
| **2020 Robert Lewandowski** | *Bayern Munich & Poland* |
| **2021 Robert Lewandowski** | *Bayern Munich & Poland* |

# 2022 WINNERS

| Rank | Name | Total |
|---|---|---|
| **MEN'S WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **Lionel Messi** *Paris Saint-Germain & Argentina* | 323 |
| 2 | **Kylian Mbappe** *Paris Saint-Germain & France* | 234 |
| 3 | **Karim Benzema** *Real Madrid & France* | 174 |
| 4 | **Luka Modric** *Real Madrid & Croatia* | 90 |
| 5 | **Erling Haaland** *B. Dortmund/Manchester City & Norway* | 72 |
| 6 | **Sadio Mane** *Liverpool/Bayern Munich & Senegal* | 26 |
| 7= | **Kevin De Bruyne** *Manchester City & Belgium* | 17 |
| 7= | **Robert Lewandowski** *Bayern Munich/Barcelona & Poland* | 17 |
| 9= | **Emiliano Martinez** *Aston Villa & Argentina* | 9 |
| 9= | **Thibaut Courtois** *Real Madrid & Belgium* | 9 |
| 11= | **Antoine Griezmann** *Atletico Madrid & France* | 8 |
| 11= | **Yassine Bounou** *Sevilla & Morocco* | 8 |
| 13= | **Jude Bellingham** *B. Dortmund & England* | 6 |
| 13= | **Vinicius Junior** *Real Madrid & Brazil* | 6 |
| 15= | **Harry Kane** *Tottenham Hotspur & England* | 3 |
| 15= | **Mohamed Salah** *Liverpool & Egypt* | 3 |
| 15= | **Neymar** *Paris Saint-Germain & Brazil* | 3 |
| 15= | **Rodrigo De Paul** *Atletico Madrid & Argentina* | 3 |
| 15= | **Thiago Silva** *Chelsea & Brazil* | 3 |
| 20= | **Achraf Hakimi** *Paris Saint-Germain & Morocco* | 2 |
| 20= | **Lorenzo Pellegrini** *Roma & Italy* | 2 |
| 20= | **Rafael Leao** *Milan & Portugal* | 2 |
| 20= | **Sofyan Amrabat** *Fiorentina & Morocco* | 2 |
| 24= | **Alexis Mac Allister** *Brighton & Argentina* | 1 |
| 24= | **Bukayo Saka** *Arsenal & England* | 1 |
| 24= | **Casemiro** *Real Madrid/Manchester United & Brazil* | 1 |
| 24= | **Goncalo Ramos** *Benfica & Portugal* | 1 |
| 24= | **Josko Gvardiol** *RB Leipzig & Croatia* | 1 |
| 24= | **Khvicha Kvaratskhelia** *Rubin Kazan/Dinamo Batumi/Napoli & Georgia* | 1 |
| 24= | **Pedri** *Barcelona & Spain* | 1 |
| 24= | **Richarlison** *Everton/Tottenham Hotspur & Brazil* | 1 |
| **MEN'S WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **Lionel Scaloni** *Argentina* | 26 |
| 2 | **Walid Regragui** *Morocco* | 19 |
| 3 | **Carlo Ancelotti** *Real Madrid* | 11 |
| 4 | **Pep Guardiola** *Manchester City* | 3 |
| 5 | **Didier Deschamps** *France* | 2 |
| 6= | **Jose Mourinho** *Roma* | 1 |
| 6= | **Kjetil Knutsen** *Bodo/Glimt* | 1 |
| 6= | **Luciano Spalletti** *Napoli* | 1 |
| 6= | **Mikel Arteta** *Arsenal* | 1 |
| 6= | **Oliver Glasner** *Eintracht Frankfurt* | 1 |
| 6= | **Stefano Pioli** *Milan* | 1 |
| **MEN'S WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **Argentina** | 36 |
| 2 | **Real Madrid** | 13 |
| 3 | **Morocco** | 10 |
| 4 | **Manchester City** | 3 |
| 5= | **Bayern Munich** | 1 |
| 5= | **Club Brugge** | 1 |
| 5= | **France** | 1 |
| 5= | **Roma** | 1 |
| **WOMEN'S WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **Beth Mead** *Arsenal & England* | 106 |
| 2 | **Alexia Putellas** *Barcelona & Spain* | 60 |
| 3 | **Sam Kerr** *Chelsea & Australia* | 35 |
| 4= | **Alexandra Popp** *Wolfsburg & Germany* | 31 |
| 4= | **Lena Oberdorf** *Wolfsburg & Germany* | 31 |
| 6 | **Aitana Bonmati** *Barcelona & Spain* | 30 |
| 7 | **Keira Walsh** *Manchester City/Barcelona & England* | 27 |
| 8 | **Leah Williamson** *Arsenal & England* | 22 |
| 9 | **Ada Hegerberg** *Lyon & Norway* | 11 |
| 10 | **Sophia Smith** *Portland Thorns & USA* | 9 |
| 11 | **Wendie Renard** *Lyon & France* | 8 |
| 12 | **Millie Bright** *Chelsea & England* | 5 |
| 13= | **Catarina Macario** *Lyon & USA* | 4 |
| 13= | **Lina Magull** *Bayern Munich & Germany* | 4 |
| 13= | **Lucy Bronze** *Manchester City/Barcelona & England* | 4 |
| 16= | **Caroline Graham Hansen** *Barcelona & Norway* | 3 |
| 16= | **Georgia Stanway** *Manchester City/Bayern Munich & England* | 3 |
| 16= | **Grace Geyoro** *Paris Saint-Germain & France* | 3 |
| 19= | **Alessia Russo** *Manchester United & England* | 2 |
| 19= | **Chloe Kelly** *Manchester City & England* | 2 |
| 19= | **Linda Caicedo** *Deportivo Cali & Colombia* | 2 |
| 22= | **Amandine Henry** *Lyon & France* | 1 |
| 22= | **Khadija Shaw** *Manchester City & Jamaica* | 1 |
| 22= | **Mary Earps** *Manchester United & England* | 1 |
| **WOMEN'S WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **Sarina Wiegman** *England* | 25 |
| 2 | **Sonia Bompastor** *Lyon* | 2 |
| **WOMEN'S WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR** | | |
| 1 | **England** | 25 |
| 2 | **Lyon** | 2 |

# THE VOTING PANEL

| | |
|---|---|
| **Adam White** | *France* |
| **Adel Ferdowsipour** | *Iran* |
| **Alexander Bobrov** | *Russia* |
| **Ashok Purohit** | *Oman* |
| **Asif Burhan** | *England* |
| **Boris Bogdanov** | *Russia* |
| **Carl Worswick** | *Colombia* |
| **Danny Lewis** | *England* |
| **Dariusz Kurowski** | *Poland* |
| **Darren Fletcher** | *England* |
| **Domenic Aquilina** | *Malta* |
| **Emanuel Rosu** | *Romania* |
| **Emanuele Giulianelli** | *Italy* |
| **Emmanuel Ayamga** | *Ghana* |
| **Fabio Licari** | *Italy* |
| **Francois Colin** | *Belgium* |
| **Glenn Moore** | *England* |
| **Guillem Balague** | *Spain* |
| **Henry Flynn** | *Spain* |
| **James Kelly** | *England* |
| **James Nalton** | *Europe/United States* |
| **Jamie Carragher** | *England* |
| **Jamie Evans** | *World Soccer* |
| **Jared Tinslay** | *World Soccer* |
| **Jennifer O'Neill** | *England* |
| **Jim Holden** | *England* |
| **Joe Phelan** | *England* |
| **John Duerden** | *Asia* |
| **Jonathan Pearce** | *England* |
| **Josh Butler** | *England* |
| **Keir Radnedge** | *England* |
| **Kevin Palmer** | *England* |
| **Klaas-Jan Droppert** | *Netherlands* |
| **Lasana Liburd** | *Trinidad & Tobago* |
| **Les Dickens** | *Ecuador* |
| **Lukas Vrablik** | *Slovakia* |
| **Manos Staramopoulos** | *Greece* |
| **Mark Gleeson** | *South Africa* |
| **Mark Pitman** | *Wales* |
| **Martin del Palacio Langer** | *Mexico* |
| **Mike Plastow** | *Japan* |
| **Milorad Stojmanovski** | *North Macedonia* |
| **Miron Goihman** | *Moldova* |
| **Molly Hudson** | *England* |
| **Musa Okwonga** | *England* |
| **Nick Bidwell** | *Europe* |
| **Oleg Zadernovsky** | *Ukraine* |
| **Oluwashina Okeleji** | *Nigeria* |
| **Paddy Agnew** | *Italy* |
| **Paul Hassall** | *England* |
| **Peter Drury** | *England* |
| **Peterjon Cresswell** | *Hungary* |
| **Phil Gordon** | *Scotland* |
| **Philippe Auclair** | *France* |
| **Rasim Movsumzadeh** | *Azerbaijan* |
| **Rumen Paytashev** | *Bulgaria* |
| **Ryan Baldi** | *England* |
| **Sam Beckwith** | *Czech Republic* |
| **Sam Matterface** | *England* |
| **Samindra Kunti** | *Belgium* |
| **Sander Berends** | *Netherlands* |
| **Sasa Ibrulj** | *Bosnia & Herzegovina* |
| **Sean Creedon** | *Republic of Ireland* |
| **Sid Lowe** | *Spain* |
| **Simon Hill** | *Australia* |
| **Sophie Lawson** | *England/Europe* |
| **Stephen Fishlock** | *World Soccer* |
| **Steve Menary** | *England* |
| **Tom Kundert** | *Portugal* |
| **Troels Bager Thogersen** | *Denmark* |
| **Victor Gusev** | *Russia* |
| **Vidir Sigurdsson** | *Iceland* |
| **Vladimir Novak** | *Serbia* |
| **Zdravko Reic** | *Croatia* |

**European champions...England Women**

PLAYER

# LIONEL MESSI

## World Player of the Year

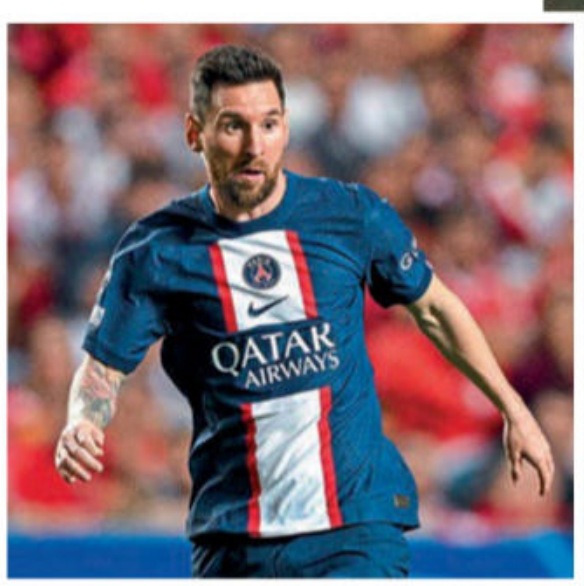
Some ran to Gonzalo Montiel, who had just scored the winning penalty. Some ran to goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, who had just produced heroics and theatrics during the shootout. But in the euphoric seconds after winning the World Cup, most of Argentina's players and coaching staff ran to their captain to celebrate. Argentina had won the country's third title. And yet, almost more importantly, Lionel Messi had won the World Cup.

Messi is the idol not only of supporters but also of the players that he captains. There was a similar scene of his team-mates rushing to celebrate with Messi when Argentina won the Copa America in 2021 in Brazil. "My dream was to win the World Cup for Lionel Messi," goalkeeper Emi Martinez told supporters back home during the World Cup victory parade.

The narrative of whether Lionel Messi could emulate Diego Maradona and win the World Cup has intensified over the course of his career.

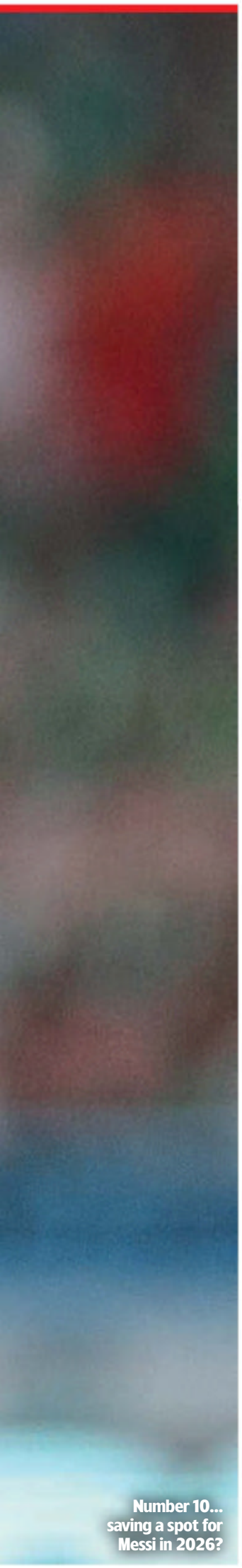
There is the famous photo of a dejected 18-year-old Messi, arms folded, left on the bench by coach Jose Pekerman during the 2006 World Cup. There was the failure to score a single goal in the competition, as the experiment of Maradona the coach went off the rails in 2010 in South Africa. There was the 2014 final defeat to Germany, and the disastrous 2018 campaign.

The disappointment of the 2015 and 2016 Copa America final defeats to Chile only compounded the growing pressure on Messi to replicate his form with




**Settled in...Messi has found his feet in Paris in 2022**

Finalissima...Messi is surrounded by Italy defenders at Wembley



Number 10... saving a spot for Messi in 2026?

Barcelona for the national team. After briefly retiring from international football, the narrative would eventually shift.

Argentina's national team set-up was transformed after the 2018 World Cup under coach Lionel Scaloni. In 2021 Messi finally won a major title with his country, defeating favourites Brazil at the Maracana.

Into 2022, Messi once again led his country to victory, this time against Italy at Wembley in the Finalissima – the second piece of silverware in the space of a year.

Now at 35 years of age, Qatar represented the last opportunity to have a significant impact and contribution on his country's World Cup campaign.

It was a different Messi to the one we have been accustomed to seeing over the years. He was slower, at times walking on the pitch as the youthful side Scaloni had built scurried around him.

It also saw a competitive, at times fierce, Messi who set the emotional tone of the Argentina campaign. Messi has rarely publicly shown the same charisma or personality of previous Argentinian World Cup-winning captains Daniel Passarella or Maradona. Yet his line: "What are you looking at, fool?" directed towards Dutch forward Wout Weghorst after the heated quarter-final is now immortalised and can be seen on T-shirts across Argentina.

On the pitch in Qatar, Messi continued to rack up more records. He became the first player to score in each phase of a World Cup finals, from the group stage through every knockout stage to the final.

Along the way to lifting the treasured trophy Messi continued to set new records, overtaking those held by a host of the game's legends. He broke Pele's record of 20 goals and assists combined in World Cups. He moved past Lothar Matthaus' record of 25 games played at World Cup finals. He surpassed Paolo Maldini's record for minutes played. He beat Maradona's record of Argentina games captained and passed Gabriel Batistuta's goalscoring record for Argentina at World Cup finals.

And behind the metrics was still the guile, the skill and moments of magic, perhaps captured at its finest in his assist for Julian Alvarez against Croatia.

Winning the World Cup was the crowning moment of Messi's illustrious and unparalleled career. In captaining Argentina to win the World Cup, he wins *World Soccer*'s Player of the Year for a sixth time.

It led to a renewed debate about comparisons with Maradona. "For there to be a disciple you need a master," say some older hats in Buenos Aires when talking about the two. Older generations will still side with Maradona, for what *El Diez* meant to people and to the country as a whole. They admire his combative charisma and accepted his faults.

Yet the more taciturn Messi is in the same pantheon. The walls of the city of Rosario are filled with murals of their most famous son. "Messi is more than a sportsman," says Orlando Verna, sociology lecturer at the University of Rosario. "He is a great athlete, but he also symbolises cultural and social questions that are important for Argentine society. He is a model as a sportsman and also as a family man."

By now, Messi's club form in 2022 is a mere footnote, but his displays, goals and two titles with Paris Saint-Germain (Ligue 1 and the Champions Trophy), add to his astonishing career statistics.

In the year he reached the age of 35, he scored just as many goals, taking his career tally to over 800. He reached 1,000 career games. And with four more titles, two with PSG and two with the national team, he now counts 42 winners' medals.

**On the pitch in Qatar, Messi continued to rack up more records...and behind the metrics was still the guile, the skill and moments of magic**

From the outset this was to be his last World Cup. But for now he has dismissed the idea of standing down from the national team. "I just like playing football too much," he said. And his coach Scaloni has mooted the idea he could yet feature in 2026. "In a squad of 26 players there is no problem saving the number ten for him."

*Joel Richards*

**FACT FILE**

**Age** *35 (24.06.87)*
**Club** *Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)*
**Country** *Argentina*
**Previous clubs** *Barcelona*
**2022 Honours** *World Cup, Finalissima, Ligue 1, Champions Trophy*

COACH / TEAM

# LIONEL SCALONI & ARGENTINA

## World Manager Of The Year, World Team Of The Year

Five million people took to the streets in Buenos Aires for the euphoric celebrations of Argentina's World Cup triumph, the first in 36 years. The mastermind behind the country's third World Cup victory was Lionel Scaloni, at 44 years of age the youngest manager in the competition. He now stands alongside legendary coaches Cesar Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo as World Cup winners, and the first Argentinian to win *World Soccer's* Manager of the Year award.

Scaloni's achievement of having transformed the Argentina national team into world champions in less than four years is magnified when considering this was his first formal coaching job.

Little was left from the wreckage of Argentina's disastrous 2018 World Cup campaign in Russia. The abiding memory of that tournament for Argentina is not so much of the pulsating round-of-16 defeat to France as the abject 3-0 loss to Croatia in the group phase.

That competition marked the end of the line for a generation of players that were bruised by failure to win a major trophy despite reaching the 2014 World Cup final as well as the 2015 and 2016 Copa America finals.

The AFA ripped up coach Jorge Sampaoli's contract that had another four years to run. With no high-profile replacement in sight, AFA president

**Manager of the Year...Scaloni rallies his players during extra-time of the World Cup final**

Claudio "Chiqui" Tapia handed the reins to Scaloni, one of Sampaoli's assistants in Russia, on an interim basis.

In the months after his appointment, Scaloni had to fend off questions from the local press about his credentials. "I should have brought my certificate to show you," he said at one press conference. While he has the UEFA Pro licence, Scaloni had no formal coaching experience when he took on the responsibility of coaching Argentina.

It was only a year later, after guiding the side to third place in the 2019 Copa America, that the AFA ratified Scaloni as coach until Qatar.

Before that confirmation, with the help of his backroom staff comprised of former national team stars Pablo Aimar, Walter Samuel and Roberto Ayala, Scaloni had already gone about building a new-look side, a new support-cast for Messi, with a view to challenging for the title in Qatar.

**Scaloni gradually shaped a side that would embark on a 36-match unbeaten run leading up to the World Cup. During that run, Messi guided the team to win the 2021 Copa America, beating Brazil at the Maracana Stadium in Rio…and in June 2022 Argentina won the Finalissima**

The old guard that had narrowly missed out in three finals was phased out. The likes of Javier Mascherano, Gonzalo Higuain and Lucas Biglia would not return. The door was flung wide open for a new generation of players to earn call-ups.

In came goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, defenders Nahuel Molina, Gonzalo Montiel and Cristian "Cuti" Romero, midfielders Rodrigo De Paul and Leandro Paredes, as well as striker Lautaro Martinez.

Scaloni gradually shaped a side that would embark on a 36-match unbeaten run leading up to the World Cup. During that run, Messi guided the team to win the 2021 Copa America, beating Brazil at the Maracana Stadium in Rio. That win released the pressure valve for both Messi, who finally had major silverware with his country, but also for the national team, ending a three-decade run without a trophy.

As South American champions, in June 2022 Argentina won the Finalissima against Italy. The European champions were deflated from missing out on World Cup qualification, but it was nonetheless a major scalp for Argentina that ramped up hope back home.

Expectation for the side's chances in Qatar began to soar. It would be Lionel Messi's last World Cup. It would also be the first World Cup since the death of national idol Diego Maradona, who passed away in late 2020. The build-up to the World Cup captivated the nation, many people needing to disconnect from a difficult social and economic reality in their daily lives.

Scaloni's Plan A was scuppered by injury to Giovani Lo Celso. The midfielder was widely viewed as a key partner in crime for Messi and an integral part of the starting XI. Injuries to Joaquin Correa as well as Nicolas Gonzalez led to further changes to the final 26-man squad. Argentina travelled to Qatar with 19 players making their World Cup debuts.

Saudi Arabia brought the *Albiceleste* down to ground with a bang in the opening game, but that defeat set the stage for Scaloni to bring in necessary changes where he saw fit.

Against Mexico, 23-year-old Alexis Mac Allister started in midfield. 21-year-old Enzo Fernandez came off the bench to score in that game and earn a place alongside Mac Allister for the third group game against Poland.

With Scaloni's first-choice striker Lautaro Martinez struggling with an ankle injury, 22-year-old forward Julian Alvarez lined up against Poland. Going into the knockout phase Argentina had a new-look side that was dynamic, robust and bursting with energy to support Messi. Scaloni also shifted tactics, playing three different formations against the Netherlands, Croatia and then France in the final.

**Team of the Year… Argentina players react after Gonzalo Montiel's World Cup-winning penalty**

Argentina produced passages of football during moments in the final that delighted supporters back home, playing with real verve and character. Relinquishing the two-goal lead, for the second time in the competition, and the drama of going to penalties only added to the epic.

The world champions now look to the 2024 Copa America.

*Joel Richards*

## PREVIOUS WINNERS

### WORLD MANAGER OF THE YEAR

**1982** Enzo Bearzot, *Italy*
**1983** Sepp Piontek, *Denmark*
**1984** Michel Hidalgo, *France*
**1985** Terry Venables, *Barcelona*
**1986** Guy Thys, *Belgium*
**1987** Johan Cruyff, *Ajax*
**1988** Rinus Michels, *Netherlands/B. Leverkusen*
**1989** Arrigo Sacchi, *Milan*
**1990** Franz Beckenbauer, *West Germany/Marseille*
**1991** Michel Platini, *France*
**1992** Richard Moller Nielsen, *Denmark*
**1993** Alex Ferguson, *Manchester United*
**1994** Carlos Alberto Parreira, *Brazil*
**1995** Louis van Gaal, *Ajax*
**1996** Berti Vogts, *Germany*
**1997** Ottmar Hitzfeld, *Borussia Dortmund*
**1998** Arsene Wenger, *Arsenal*
**1999** Alex Ferguson, *Manchester United*
**2000** Dino Zoff, *Italy*
**2001** Gerard Houllier, *Liverpool*
**2002** Guus Hiddink, *South Korea/PSV*
**2003** Carlo Ancelotti, *Milan*
**2004** Jose Mourinho, *Porto/Chelsea*
**2005** Jose Mourinho, *Chelsea*
**2006** Marcello Lippi, *Italy*
**2007** Alex Ferguson, *Manchester United*
**2008** Alex Ferguson, *Manchester United*
**2009** Pep Guardiola, *Barcelona*
**2010** Jose Mourinho, *Internazionale/Real Madrid*
**2011** Pep Guardiola, *Barcelona*
**2012** Vicente del Bosque, *Spain*
**2013** Jupp Heynckes, *Bayern Munich*
**2014** Joachim Low, *Germany*
**2015** Luis Enrique, *Barcelona*
**2016** Claudio Ranieri, *Leicester City*
**2017** Zinedine Zidane, *Real Madrid*
**2018** Didier Deschamps, *France*
**2019** Jurgen Klopp, *Liverpool*
**2020** Hansi Flick, *Bayern Munich*
**2021** Roberto Mancini, *Italy*

### WORLD TEAM OF THE YEAR

**1982** *Brazil*
**1983** *Hamburg*
**1984** *France*
**1985** *Everton*
**1986** *Argentina*
**1987** *Porto*
**1988** *Netherlands*
**1989** *Milan*
**1990** *West Germany*
**1991** *France*
**1992** *Denmark*
**1993** *Parma*
**1994** *Milan*
**1995** *Ajax*
**1996** *Nigeria*
**1997** *Borussia Dortmund*
**1998** *France*
**1999** *Manchester United*
**2000** *France*
**2001** *Liverpool*
**2002** *Brazil*
**2003** *Milan*
**2004** *Greece*
**2005** *Liverpool*
**2006** *Barcelona*
**2007** *Iraq*
**2008** *Spain*
**2009** *Barcelona*
**2010** *Spain*
**2011** *Barcelona*
**2012** *Spain*
**2013** *Bayern Munich*
**2014** *Germany*
**2015** *Barcelona*
**2016** *Leicester City*
**2017** *Real Madrid*
**2018** *France*
**2019** *Liverpool*
**2020** *Bayern Munich*
**2021** *Italy*

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

# SARINA WIEGMAN, ENGLAND & BETH MEAD

## Women's World Manager of the Year, Women's World Team of the Year & Women's World Player of the Year

As *Football's Coming Home* blasted out of the speakers and players embraced in ecstasy, there was a sense of uncharted joy around Wembley Stadium. Over 87,000 spectators – a record for the occasion – had just witnessed England beat Germany 2-1 in the final of the Women's European Championship, securing the nation's first major senior trophy since the men's team had lifted the 1966 World Cup against the same country at the same postcode.

Tears, unhinged dance moves, knee slides across glittered confetti and celebratory photos ensued. The joyous scenes even spread to the press conference room – often a more rigid, reserved environment – when the players interrupted coach Sarina Wiegman's de-brief with their own rendition of Baddiel and Skinner's famous anthem; Mary Earps and Lucy Bronze dancing on their manager's desk like two uncaring school kids who'd just scored perfect tens. And they didn't hit all the right notes, but who cared? They'd been fine-tuned on the pitch and the results had been glorious.

Credit must go to Sue Campbell, the director of women's football at the FA, for her role in bringing silverware to England. Few people have done more to advance the women's game in this country than Campbell, although securing the appointment of Wiegman was perhaps her smartest move yet.

*World Soccer*'s Women's Manager of the Year took over from Phil Neville in September 2021 to become the first permanent non-British coach of the Lionesses. She arrived with an impressive CV that included the Best FIFA Women's Coach awards of 2017 and 2020 and, most notably, the 2017 European Championship trophy with her home country, the Netherlands.

**Women's World Manager of the Year ...Sarina Wiegman**

Instilling a winning culture and agreeing on shared goals has clearly been crucial to Wiegman's success, as much as it has the squad buying into it; players have frequently referred to the team, team success and team commitment in interviews over the past year.

"We agreed on a couple of things about behaviour and they weren't just words. We lived it and this is the result," Wiegman said after the final with Germany. "If you really want to win, really want to become better every single day, you can do it and that is what I have noticed the whole year."

Results were instantly impressive. A debut 8-0 victory against North Macedonia and a record 20-0 win versus Latvia helped put the Lionesses 53-0 up against all opponents from her first six games in charge in 2021. There was no New Year's hangover either as Arnold Clark Cup success followed

**Women's World Team of the Year...England**

in February, which included a trophy-clinching victory over Germany – a first in history on home soil for the Lionesses but, crucially, not the last.

The hosts thus entered the European Championship as one of the most in-form sides worldwide across both the male and female game, unbeaten in 14 matches of the Wiegman reign and letting in just three goals.

They conceded just twice more en route to the Euros trophy, scoring 22 times themselves, including a record-breaking 8-0 win over Norway in the group stage, a spectacular Georgia Stanway strike in extra-time against Spain, an outrageous backheeled flick by Alessia Russo against Sweden in the semi-final and the one that won it all; a scruffy, close-range poke by super sub Chloe Kelly to secure the trophy.

The fact that Kelly was to score the winning goal was perhaps the most uplifting of ends to the tournament after the Manchester City forward suffered a career-threatening ACL injury in 2021 that saw her sidelined for 11 months, only returning to the pitch two months before the tournament commenced.

Her club-mate, and experienced defender, Steph Houghton was not so lucky. She had her captaincy removed while out injured and was then omitted from England's squad by Wiegman, with Leah Williamson handed the armband.

**Women's World Player of the Year ...Beth Mead**

Manuela Zinsberger – also hit a hat-trick against Norway and became the first player to score as many as five group-stage goals in the competition's history with another in the 5-0 win against Northern Ireland.

Her half-volley on the turn against Sweden in the semi-finals was her sixth – a joint-record for a player at a single Women's European Championship – which ensured she finished the tournament with both the Golden Boot and Best Player prizes.

Domestically, Mead's marvellous form in an Arsenal shirt was also a reason the Gunners came within 45 minutes of clinching the 2021-22 Women's Super League title. She ended the season with 19 goals and assists combined, created 58 chances – the most by any player in a single season in the competition's history – and became the league's all-time top assister.

**The European Championship trophy was England and Sarina Wiegman's ultimate reward for a year of graft, but their success transcends silverware**

It may have raised some eyebrows at the time, but the image of Williamson lifting the trophy surely put any doubts over that decision to bed. The Arsenal centre-back's distribution and assurance on the ball was one of England's main assets in building play from the back, as was her partnership with Millie Bright.

But there were star performers all over the pitch. Earps was colossal in goal, full-backs Bronze and Rachel Daly added thrust down the wings, Stanway and Keira Walsh dominated the midfield, and Fran Kirby, Lauren Hemp, Beth Mead and Ellen White each caused havoc in attack.

When things weren't quite working out, Wiegman was proactive with her substitutes; often making the same tweaks each game that involved attackers Ella Toone, Russo and Kelly entering the fray.

Of course, there could only be one *World Soccer* Women's Player of the Year, and that prize goes to Mead. The scorer of the tournament's opening goal against Austria – a cheeky lobbed winner over the head of club team-mate

Her Arsenal and England exploits weren't enough to see her win the 2022 Women's Ballon d'Or – that prize went to Barcelona's Alexia Putellas – but she did finish second on the podium.

Life isn't without its setbacks though, and a ruptured ACL in November has cast doubts on her participation at the Women's World Cup. She'll be doing all she can to be fit for the tournament and can find solace in team-mate Kelly's recovery and Euros-winning goal.

The European Championship trophy was England and Wiegman's ultimate reward for a year of graft, but their success transcends silverware. The excitement they generated for the women's game was unparalleled, with past players like the Lionesses' former striker Kelly Smith admitting that they'd never experienced anything like the hype during last summer's tournament.

Smith, the Lionesses' former record goalscorer, is one of many figures that deserve credit for laying the foundations for this success. Her generation of players, which also included modern-day pundits like Alex Scott, Karen Carney, Eni Aluko, Fara Williams, Rachel Brown-Finnis and Lianne Sanderson, took England to new heights under manager Hope Powell. The high point of Powell's 15 years in charge of England came in 2009, when she guided them to the final of the European Championship against Germany, only to lose 6-2.

There is a direct link between that 2009 team and the 2022 one – and not just through midfielder Jill Scott, the only player to feature in both finals. Powell's team served as inspirational role models to the team of today, showing that it was possible to grow up and become a footballer.

Now that legacy continues to grow. A whole new generation has been inspired, and it was a notable feature of the Euros just how many children – boys and girls – were able to attend matches. On the day of the final, Wembley Way was filled with kids bearing the names of Lionesses on the back of their shirts, and it was a similar story at Brighton's Amex and Bramall Lane in Sheffield when they each hosted knockout round matches.

After the final, England's friendly with world champions United States at Wembley sold out within 24 hours of tickets going on sale, and there has been an upsurge in attendances across Women's Super League grounds during the 2022-23 season.

The first domino has fallen; with the Women's World Cup taking place in the summer, many more are set to follow.

*Jared Tinslay*

## PREVIOUS WINNERS

### Women's World Player of the Year

**2020**
Pernille Harder, *Wolfsburg/Chelsea & Denmark*
**2021**
Alexia Putellas, *Barcelona & Spain*

### Women's World Manager of the Year

**2020**
Jean-Luc Vasseur, *Lyon*
**2021**
Lluis Cortes, *Barcelona*

### Women's World Team of the Year

**2020**
Lyon
**2021**
Barcelona

MANAGER

# YURIY VERNYDUB

## The ex-Sheriff Tiraspol coach quit his job to fight in his home country

Almost a year has passed since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian people have been left without heating, electricity and water in winter, while the conflict has claimed the lives of thousands of people.

Yet in spite of this, the spirit of the Ukrainian people has remained unbroken. The Russian invaders could not, as planned, take Kyiv in three days and occupy the entire country in a couple of weeks – thanks to the resilience of Ukrainians like Yuriy Vernydub.

"On February 24, before the return leg of the Europa League play-offs with Braga, I didn't think about football at all," he recalled. "We lost on penalties, but at that moment I was only thinking about how to return to Ukraine as soon as possible and help my country."

That clash with Braga proved to be Vernydub's final match in charge of Sheriff Tiraspol, thus bringing to an end the most successful period of his coaching career. Under his guidance, Sheriff became the first Moldovan club in history to reach the group stage of the Champions League in 2021-22. And they did more than make up the numbers, defeating eventual champions Real Madrid 2-1 at the Bernabeu.

In May, Sheriff lifted the Moldovan league title for the second year in a row, but Vernydub wasn't around. One month later his contract, which was valid until 2024, was terminated by mutual consent.

It seems ironic now, given that he has spent most of this year fighting Russia, that Vernydub ended his playing career there. The former centre-back captained Zenit Saint Petersburg to the Russian Cup in 1999, and was offered the chance to stay at the club as a coach when he retired a year later.

Instead, he cut his coaching teeth back in Ukraine at Metalurh Zaporizhzhia and Zorya Luhansk, whom he took charge of in 2011, regularly competing in the Europa League.

Yet it was here that he also got his first taste of the conflict with Russia. In 2014, due to the occupation, the club was forced to leave its Luhansk base and relocate to Zaporizhzhia. "The pro-Russian separatists simply kicked us out of there," he said.

**Final game...Vernydub during Sheriff Tiraspol's clash against Braga**

When he returned in February, the 56-year-old signed up as a volunteer in the artillery brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Yet football has remained in his life. "Before the start of the war, I received lucrative offers from Russia. But even then, I decided that I would never go back. I was born in Ukraine. Why should I betray the Ukrainian people and my country? Because of money?"

In June, he was appointed head coach of Ukrainian Premier League club Kryvbas from the city of Kryvyi Rih, the birthplace of Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky. They currently lie in eighth place, with the campaign set to resume in March, although nothing can be taken for granted. The war continues to bring terrible losses to Ukraine. Recently, in Kryvyi Rih, a Russian rocket destroyed half of a three-storey building, instantly killing five residents, including a one-year-old boy.

"I can't even find the words to describe what Russia is doing now," says Vernydub. "I have no doubt that Ukraine will win this war. I'm sure of it. It will happen because this tragedy has united us all as a nation."

*Oleg Zadernovsky*

> "At that moment I was only thinking about how to return to Ukraine as soon as possible and help my country"
>
> Yuriy Vernydub

MANAGER

# WALID REGRAGUI

## The up-and-coming coach worked minor miracles in 2022

Some 18 months ago when he was negotiating to take over at Moroccan champions Wydad, Walid Regragui proved surprisingly demanding for an up-and-coming coach who had just been offered one of the top jobs in African football.

Usually someone of his profile, still working their way up the coaching ladder, would have jumped at the opportunity of taking over one of the continent's leading club sides with no strings attached, but the former international defender was not going to compromise on his standards for anyone.

It took several days of negotiation with Wydad president Said Naciri before Regragui signed a contract, with all his demands around support staff and conditions met. Naciri is not one to buckle in a negotiation but must have sensed he was onto something special and so agreed to give Regragui what he wanted.

His hunch proved right as Wydad won the league title in Regragui's first season, finishing three points above Casablanca rivals Raja, and, much more importantly, took the African Champions League in a spectacular final success against the record-breaking Al Ahly of Egypt.

Admittedly their 2-0 final win at the end of May came with home advantage, but it was also a match in which Regragui got his tactics spot on and countered anything that Al Ahly had to offer.

Already for months there had been mounting speculation about the future of then-Morocco coach Vahid Halilhodzic, starting after a poor Africa Cup of Nations finals campaign in January and gathering momentum in spite of Morocco qualifying for Qatar in March with an easy aggregate triumph over the DR Congo.

Halilhodzic had an uneasy relationship with the players, banishing several from the squad and did little to temper his taciturn ways. But it looked like he would stay on despite the mounting pressure – that is until Wydad won the Champions League at the end of May. That allowed a vacillating Royal Moroccan Football Federation room to manoeuvre, although it still took some negotiation to be able to fire Halilhodzic in August and install Regragui with less than three months to the World Cup kick-off.

**New manager bounce....Regragui was a popular appointment with Morocco's players**

It proved a masterstroke as Regragui rallied Hakim Ziyech back to the national team cause and lifted the mood in the camp, able to unify what is in essence a very disparate group of players.

That Morocco were able to go on and become the first African and Arab country to reach the World Cup semi-finals had a lot to do with the fighting spirit that the 47-year-old was able to instil in his side.

Regragui proved immensely popular, striking the right tone between serious work and enjoyment. His players held him in high affection, bouncing him up in the air after several of their upset successes in Qatar and vigorously rubbing his shaven "avocado" head.

More importantly he proved a smart tactician, as Morocco's different approaches in the tournament attested to. They were not only a defensive side with counter-attacking potential but could also play on the front foot when needed, proving that he could seamlessly translate his astute coaching ability at club level to the international stage.

*Mark Gleeson*

> Wydad won the league title in Regragui's first season...and, much more importantly, took the African Champions League in a spectacular final success against the record-breaking Al Ahly

MANAGER

# JOSE MOURINHO

## The managerial maestro continues to be "The Special One"

"Dad couldn't believe it when he heard that the club had hired Mourinho. He was totally delighted. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to see Mourinho's Roma play. When the referee blew the final whistle last night, I felt him close to me, it was as if he was still supporting us from up above..."

That post from an anonymous Roma fan on a club forum was filed on May 26, 2022, the day after Roma had beaten Dutch side Feyenoord 1-0 to win the first edition of the Europa Conference League. For many fans, the competition may look like a third-tier consolation cup, a "Donkey Derby" if you like, for those not good enough to run in the Classics.

But do not try selling that line to Roma fans. For them, Roma's win that night in Tirana was one of the greatest days in the club's history. A UEFA trophy win is a UEFA trophy win, no matter what the begrudgers might say.

Furthermore, this win was Roma's first European title since they lifted the 1960-61 Fairs Cup, while it was their first in any competition since they won the Coppa Italia in 2007-08. For Italian football, the win came with a massive sense of relief at the end of a miserable season in which the national team, the Euro 2020 winners, failed to qualify for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, while Italian clubs registered a complete washout in both the Champions and Europa Leagues.

In Italy, this triumph belonged to one man more than anyone else: Jose Mourinho, the man who, incidentally, was the last coach to scale the heights of European football with an Italian club, leading Internazionale to the Champions League in 2009-10.

When Mourinho arrived back in Italian football to join Roma in the summer of 2021, he had been greeted as a returning wizard by the massively enthusiastic Roma fans. One year later, in his first season he had delivered a trophy; try telling the *Romanisti* that Mourinho is no longer one of the finest coaches in the modern game.

**Europa Conference League winner... Jose Mourinho**

The thousands who took to the streets of central Rome for a night-long celebration of the Europa Conference League victory, marked by carousels of cars and fireworks, could not have cared less that a majority of non-Italian critics had greeted Mourinho's move from Premier League side Tottenham Hotspur to Roma the previous summer as definitive proof that "The Special One" was no longer quite so special.

The pragmatist might argue that 59-year-old Mourinho is no longer in the top tier of coaches alongside Carlo Ancelotti, Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp, Diego Simeone or Antonio Conte, to name but the most obvious.

The reality, however, is that Mourinho is an inspirational winner, especially with underperforming clubs, as shown at Porto (2002-04), Inter (2008-10), Manchester United (2016-18) and now Roma.

Critics continue to suggest that Mourinho's time in Rome is up after a thus far indifferent campaign. It may well be. But, if that is true, it will not change the fact that he has already written a vitally important page in Roma and Italian football history. He remains "Special".

*Paddy Agnew*

The reality, however, is that Mourinho is an inspirational winner, especially with underperforming clubs

LEGEND

# ALI DAEI

## Ex-Iran striker among those to express their support for the Iranian protests

Ali Daei is a global football legend who scored 109 goals for Iran. Only Cristiano Ronaldo has managed more on the international stage. The Portugal goal machine holds his predecessor in high regard: "Ali Daei has set the standards in such a high level, that at some point even I started thinking that I might never catch him," said Ronaldo in October 2021 when he finally reached the top of the charts.

In 2022, Daei was back making headlines once more. Back in the summer he was linked with the Iran coaching job following the sacking of Dragan Skocic. It would have been his second spell in charge after leaving in 2009 following indifferent results in qualification for the 2010 World Cup. He quickly distanced himself from the speculation and Carlos Queiroz was re-appointed. It was a wise move as Daei would not have been able to do what he was about to do had he been national team coach.

Iran's time at the 2022 World Cup could not be separated from the protests that were going on in the country. The death of Mahsa Amini in September in police custody – after the 22-year-old was arrested for allegedly wearing her hijab in an inappropriate fashion – resulted in people, especially women, taking to the streets up and down the country. At the time of writing, human rights groups have estimated that security forces have killed over 400 protestors.

Daei took to social media to express his opinions, a huge deal in Iran where he is arguably the biggest football name in a country that loves the beautiful game. "Instead of suppression, violence, arrests and accusing the people of Iran of being rioters, solve their problems," Daei wrote to his ten million plus followers on Instagram shortly after the protests started.

In November, he refused an invitation to attend the World Cup, saying he wanted to be with his compatriots. "In these days when most of us are not feeling well, I answered 'no' to the official invitation of FIFA and Qatar Football Federation to attend the World Cup with my wife and daughters," Daei said, adding that he wanted to stay in his homeland and express his sympathy to families of the bereaved.

There were reports that his phone had been confiscated. His former Iranian team-mate, and fellow Bayern Munich alumni, Ali Karimi had been forced to leave the country after criticising authorities. "I have received numerous threats against myself and my family in recent months and days from some organisations, medias and unknown individuals," Daei said as Iran prepared to take on the United States in what was to be their last game of the World Cup "I was taught humanity, honour, patriotism and freedom... What do you want to achieve with such threats?" he asked.

Ali Daei was a brave striker on the pitch during an illustrious career. It also took guts to head to Germany in the 1990s at a time when few Asian players made the move to Europe. His actions and words in 2022, however, have been braver still.

*John Duerden*

**Iran legend...Ali Daei at the 2022 World Cup draw in April**

> "Instead of suppression, violence, arrests and accusing the people of Iran of being rioters, solve their problems"
>
> Ali Daei

PLAYER

# ENDRICK

## The Brazilian teenage sensation was one of the breakout stars of 2022

Not many 16-year-olds will have watched the World Cup in Qatar with a justified feeling that they might be playing in the closing stages of the next tournament. But then, Endrick of Palmeiras is not just any 16-year-old.

He came to global attention at the start of 2022 in the prestigious annual Sao Paulo youth trophy. He was 15, a full five years younger than some of his opponents. And he ran rings round all of them. The breadth of his talent was extraordinary. The stocky little left-footed striker showed himself capable of moments of individual genius – an overhead-kick from outside the penalty area will live long in the memory – and his low-centre-of-gravity dribbling skills were dazzling. But there was so much more: his spatial awareness, for example, and his choice of options.

Palmeiras had been aware for quite some time that they had something very special on their hands. Originally from Brasilia, Endrick moved to the Sao Paulo club after they saw a video compilation of him in action. And he had already won the Sao Paulo State Championship with Palmeiras at Under-11, Under-13, Under-15 and Under-20 levels. But that youth tournament at the start of 2022 was on a different scale, with clubs from all over the giant country, an army of scouts present digging for gold, and plenty of matches live on TV. It made Endrick a global superstar, the talk of the Spanish press. Before he had got anywhere near the Palmeiras first team it was already seen as a given that he would be moving to a European giant as soon as he turns 18, in July 2024.

How then would he cope with all of this mass attention? Endrick is at an age of great changes, when new desires and opportunities readily appear. Hardly surprisingly then, that this is the point at which many budding careers fall apart.

**Boy wonder...Endrick celebrates scoring for Palmeiras**

Palmeiras coach Abel Ferreira was a calming influence. Back in February there was pressure on Ferreira to take Endrick to the Club World Championship, a club obsession. The Portuguese coach drily replied that Endrick would be better served by a trip to Disneyland.

But towards the end of the season, with the league title practically in the bag and the pressure off, Ferreira decided that the time had come to make the fairy tale come true. Endrick had already been promoted to the first-team squad and now, at the end of October, he got his chance – and took it as naturally as he has dealt with all the other hoops he has jumped through.

Endrick ended the season with five appearances and three goals. The opening one, against Athletico Paranaense, was a gloriously-timed running header – it seems there is nothing he cannot do.

Palmeiras supporters are treasuring every minute. They know that before long they will only be able to watch him on television – in the colours of European giants Real Madrid and, it cannot be discounted, starring for Brazil at the 2026 World Cup.

*Tim Vickery*

> In February there was pressure on Palmeiras coach Abel Ferreira to take Endrick to the Club World Championship...he drily replied that Endrick would be better served by a trip to Disneyland

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

# SONIA BOMPASTOR

## Record-breaking coach led Lyon back to the top of the women's game in 2022

There was nothing unusual about Lyon winning the UEFA Women's Champions League, even if defeated finalists and holders Barcelona had been regarded as favourites. It was Lyon's sixth title in seven years.

What was different was the gender of the winning coach. Sonia Bompastor was the first female to win the competition while only Martina Voss (with Duisburg in 2009) and Monika Staab (with Frankfurt in 2002) won its predecessor, the UEFA Women's Cup. Voss (now Voss-Tecklenburg) is the current Germany coach and Staab is the inaugural coach of the fledgling Saudi Arabian national side.

It will be interesting to see the path Bompastor's career takes her. At 42 there is much to come, but for now the focus is on Lyon, who she captained to the Champions League in 2011 and 2012, making her the first person to win the women's competition as a player and coach.

President Jean-Michel Aulas asked Bompastor to be Lyon's first female boss in April 2021. A disastrous season, by Lyon's standards, was drawing to a close. Bompastor had been working at the club's academy since 2013 after a career in which she won 156 French caps.

She said she could do it, but with four young children would need support with childcare. Aulas' response was to increase her salary enough to cover what she needed. That support, she said, made her doubly keen to repay Aulas.

That she did. At home, helped by the implosion at Paris Saint-Germain, who they beat twice, Lyon regained the league title emphatically, claiming 64 points out of 66 to finish 11 clear of PSG, scoring 79 goals and conceding only eight.

They beat PSG home and away in Europe too, in the Champions League semi-finals, but saved their best for the final. Holders Barcelona were completely blown away as Lyon took a three-goal lead after just 33 minutes, eventually easing to a 3-1 victory.

**European champion... Bompastor lifts the Women's Champions League trophy**

With Lyon bedevilled by injuries and other clubs' investment catching up, this campaign has been harder. In Europe they were shocked 5-1 at home by Arsenal, though they responded by winning the return in London and progressed to the knockout stages as group runners up. Domestically, they went into the winter break one point behind PSG after suffering a 1-0 defeat to the Parisians in the final match before the one-month pause.

But Bompastor is used to challenges. She grew up in a football family – her father was a referee and her brother a player (and subsequently a coach) in the French lower leagues. Still, her path wasn't easy.

"When I was a young kid playing with only boys, it was hard," she has said. "You were always hearing: 'oh as a girl you shouldn't be playing', 'as a girl you don't know how to play soccer, that is for the boys'. You have to build yourself to face that.

"You have to be strong mentally and your personality has to be strong. My dad and brother were always bringing me to the stadiums, watching games, making me feel good when I was playing with the boys. They said: 'Sonia, do what you believe in'."

*Glenn Moore*

**The first female coach to win the Women's Champions League ...the first woman to win the competition as a player and coach**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

# SAM KERR

## The Chelsea and Australia superstar was in a league of her own in 2022

Fans of the WSL were treated to one of the most dramatic title races in the competition's history in 2021-22, culminating in a make-or-break final gameweek in May.

Chelsea needed to equal the result of London rivals Arsenal to become the first team to win three consecutive titles, yet found themselves trailing 2-1 to Manchester United at the break.

Things quickly changed after a stunning left-footed volley by striker Sam Kerr levelled the score a minute after half-time. Guro Reiten added a second before Kerr struck another outstanding volley – this time with her right foot after a chested control – to seal the Blues' successive silverware.

Kerr's title-clinching brace capped a sensational second season in English football, which resulted in back-to-back Golden Boot awards, her first PFA Player of the Year prize, and the league's Goal of the Season award for that second volley against the Red Devils.

By netting twice on the final weekend, she took her league tally to 20 goals for the season, in doing so becoming the first player in the league's history to hit the landmark in consecutive campaigns.

The drama didn't end there, either. A week after the title celebrations, Kerr scored another brace, this time in the FA Cup final against Manchester City at Wembley Stadium in front of her family; her second goal being the match-winner in extra-time to see Emma Hayes' side retain the trophy and lift their second piece of silverware in seven days.

On top of her domestic double with Chelsea, 2022 also saw Kerr become Australia's all-time record goalscorer, surpassing former Socceroo Tim Cahill's half-century in four fewer games, having already taken the women's record from Lisa De Vanna in 2021.

The record was sealed in spectacular fashion, coming in a five-goal haul during a remarkable 18-0 Asian Cup group-stage victory over Indonesia in January. The only disappointment was that there were no fans in the stands to share the moment due to COVID restrictions.

**Women's Super League champion... Kerr with the trophy**

A further seven international goals saw her end the year with 12 in as many games for the Matildas, including the opener in their 4-0 win over Sweden in November – the nation's biggest-ever victory over top-five opposition – and the first in a 2-0 win against Thailand a few days later.

Australia fans will be willing Kerr to maintain that form when she spearheads the co-hosts' challenge for the 2023 Women's World Cup in July and August.

Kerr is likely to be the face of the tournament, just as she was for the video game *FIFA 23*, making history as the first female footballer to grace the front cover of the global video game franchise. Pictured in her Chelsea kit alongside Paris Saint-Germain superstar Kylian Mbappe, it was a significant step for female representation in the gaming industry as well as further global exposure for women's football, especially considering this year's game attracted over 10.3 million players worldwide in its first seven days of availability.

A whirlwind 12 months that Kerr herself has even struggled to come to terms with. "I'm still not used to seeing my face on a billboard in London," she recently admitted.

*Jared Tinslay*

**On top of her domestic double with Chelsea, 2022 also saw Kerr become Australia's all-time record goalscorer**

BROADCASTER

# IAN WRIGHT

## One of the nation's favourite pundits is a champion of the under-represented

To broadcast successfully about football takes a very particular range of skills: whether you are speaking about events on or beyond the field, the timing of what you say is as important as the content itself. This is why Ian Wright is *World Soccer*'s Broadcaster of the Year: because he has the rare ability not only to comment on the sport as he sees it, but to anticipate where it can and should be going. Over the past 12 months, he can claim to have made two significant interventions that changed the way we talk about our sport for the better.

The first of these came at the turn of the year, when he referred to the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) as the most "disrespected" of all the football tournaments, going on to note that "the coverage is completely tinged with racism". These remarks, which he made in a video posted to his social media, were widely and vigorously discussed, setting the tone for more nuanced discussion of the AFCON as it progressed.

The second intervention came towards the end of the 2022 Women's European Championship, where Wright passionately addressed the host nation, who were fresh from watching their England team thrash Sweden 4-0 to reach the deciding match against Germany. "Whatever happens in the final now, if girls are not allowed to play football in their PE, just like the boys can, what are we doing?" he asked the BBC's viewers. "We have got to make sure they are able to play and get the opportunity to do so. If there's no legacy after this then what are we doing? This is as proud as I've ever felt about any England side."

This theme of speaking up despite the discomfort of others is in keeping with Wright's character from his playing days where, as the second-highest goalscorer in Arsenal's history, he showed a similar fearlessness in and around the penalty area.

**Legend...Wright at his induction into the Premier League's Hall of Fame**

Perhaps his greatest strength is that he has a variety of guises, each of which is similarly beloved by much of the public. He is the jovial foil to Roy Keane's grumpy uncle; a positive voice around an England national team so often shrouded by pessimism and negativity; the provider of fatherly advice to the Three Lions' attackers; and the generous, meticulous critic of various clubs.

Having watched him at close quarters, it is striking how quickly he absorbs information before broadcasting it to millions of people. One moment, he will be reading up on an attacking statistic, and a couple of minutes later he will drop that figure perfectly into a half-time segment. Or, as he did at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, he will tell the television audience the names of young people who died in police custody, names which until then had slipped from the news.

It was no surprise to see Wright voted Pundit of the Year by both the Broadcast Sport Awards and the Football Supporters' Association, or learn that he has received this accolade now. While he has several peers and colleagues who are outstanding at what they do, in some respects he is simply in a class of his own.

*Musa Okwonga*

> [Wright] has the rare ability not only to comment on the sport as he sees it, but to anticipate where it can and should be going

ADMINISTRATOR

# HASSAN AL THAWADI

## The man behind Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup

**World Cup architect ...Hassan Al Thawadi**

Rare indeed are the men and women who fight a hosting bid battle and remain standing, heading up the event's organisation and operation, when mission and thankless hard work has paid off.

Such a man is Hassan Al Thawadi, the Liverpool supporter who studied in Scunthorpe and Sheffield, who worked up Qatar's bid for the World Cup then oversaw the event's creation and activation, while batting away relentless western criticism... and was still standing at the final.

Most such World Cup finals or Olympics projects run for eight or nine years, from start to finish. By contrast the Qatar World Cup effort took a fearsome 14 years out of Al Thawadi's life.

Back in 2009, when fans and media were struggling to find Qatar on a map (let alone how to pronounce it), he told *World Soccer*: "Qataris love football and the idea of bringing the World Cup here one day has always been our dream.

"We have seen progress by leaps and bounds over the last ten years in so many different areas. We are pioneers and among world leaders in the fields of oil and gas. Infrastructure, building, everything. It's given us self-belief about being able to provide a unique experience for the World Cup – unique both for ourselves and for the Middle East."

By the way, he threw in, Qatar had the capacity to build imaginatively-designed all-new stadia, technology to cool temperatures for players and fans, and guarantee every fan could stay in the same hotel and see two matches a day. No other country had offered that boast since Jules Rimet took his sporting novelty to Uruguay in 1930.

In words that Al Thawadi would still have endorsed on the eve of the finals, he said: "There are certain misconceptions abroad about what this part of the world is all about. We want the rest of the world to come here, to see this, enjoy it, so we can open up doors for people to sit down together, united by a common love for football."

If only it were that simple.

Soon after Qatar had spoiled then-president Sepp Blatter's day in Zurich in December 2010 the issues of *kafala* and construction workers' conditions were engaging Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Labour Organisation. Al Thawadi also had to fend off critics whose scepticism would be redoubled after the FBI laid bare the extent of FIFA corruption in 2015.

This was the year that brought another bump in the road, with FIFA's date switch to avoid baking summer temperatures. Al Thawadi was again the lightning rod for European ire. All of it he combatted in measured tones, conceding imperfections but yielding nothing in ambitions.

Al Thawadi had to be front man, designer and diplomat as he trod a fine line between Qatar's western-educated technocrats and an old guard ever more resentful at the rest of the world's demands. Whatever anyone's angle on Qatar as hosts, the organisation was as good as it gets.

*Keir Radnedge*

Most such World Cup finals or Olympics projects run for eight or nine years, from start to finish. By contrast, the Qatar World Cup effort took a fearsome 14 years out of Al Thawadi's life

# FAREWELL TO...

**Pele**
The King.

**Ronnie Radford**
The scorer of one of the most iconic FA Cup goals of all time, Radford's 35-yard stunner helped non-league Hereford United knock First Division Newcastle United out of the competition in 1972.

**Piet Schrijvers**
The former Netherlands goalkeeper was involved at both the 1974 and 1978 World Cups, only missing the final of the latter through injury.

**Frank O'Farrell**
The former Manchester United manager succeeded Sir Matt Busby in the Old Trafford hot seat, yet only lasted 18 months in the role.

**Thomas Boy**
A renowned playmaker of vision and flair, Boy captained Mexico on home soil at the 1986 World Cup.

**Gian Piero Ventrone**
A hugely popular member of Tottenham Hotspur's backroom staff as Antonio Conte's fitness coach. Also worked at Juventus for a decade and as part of Italy's 2006 World Cup victory.

**John Hughes**
A Celtic legend who scored 189 goals in 416 appearances and won 17 major honours with the Bhoys, including the 1967 European Cup, although he was injured for the final.

**Terry Neill**
Former Arsenal and Northern Ireland centre-half and captain, who went on to manage both the club and his country, leading the Gunners to the 1979 FA Cup.

**David Moores**
Liverpool chairman from 1991 to 2007, during which time the Anfield outfit won the Champions League, UEFA Cup, FA Cup and League Cup.

**Andrew Jennings**
A trail-blazing investigative sports journalist, crucial in exposing the murky practices at the top of the game.

Real Madrid legend... Francisco "Paco" Gento

**Paco Gento**
The rapid left-winger is a Real Madrid icon after winning six European Cups and 12 La Liga crowns with *Los Blancos*: all-time records in both competitions.

**Billy Bingham**
Northern Ireland's most successful manager, leading the team to back-to-back World Cups for the only time in its history (1982 and 1986) as well as two British Home Championships.

**Freddy Rincon**
Iconic member of Colombia's squad at three consecutive World Cups from 1990 to 1998, netting the memorable goal that took them to the knockout stages for the first time in their history at Italia '90.

**Wim Jansen**
A vital member of the Netherlands side that reached back-to-back World Cup finals in 1974 and 1978, and later Celtic's first foreign manager.

**Omar Borras**
Former long-serving coach of Uruguay who won the Copa America in 1983.

**Jimmy Millar**
A prolific striker for Rangers in the 1950s and 1960s, scoring 162 goals in 317 games and helping the team to three league titles and five Scottish Cups.

**Steve Rowley**
Former Arsenal scout credited with discovering Tony Adams, Ray Parlour, Cesc Fabregas and Robin van Persie.

Rangers keeper ...Andy Goram

Germany and Hamburg icon...Seeler in 1966

**Georgi Yartsev**
Former coach of Russia, taking the team to Euro 2004 in Portugal.

**Haidar Abdul-Razzaq**
A member of the Iraq squad that famously won the 2007 Asian Cup.

**Ivica Osim**
Bosnian whose managerial feats included leading Zeljeznicar to a UEFA Cup semi-final and Yugoslavia to the quarter-finals of the 1990 World Cup.

**Joachim Streich**
Iconic forward for East Germany, holding the record for both goals (53) and caps (98) for the country.

**Hans-Jurgen Dorner**
One place behind Streich as East Germany's second-most capped player with 96 games, "Dixie" spent his entire club career with Dynamo Dresden and in 1999 was voted their greatest player.

**Andy Goram**
One of Scotland's finest goalkeepers of all time and a Rangers legend, winning five league titles in six years at Ibrox.

**Janusz Kupcewicz**
A star of the Poland side that finished third at the 1982 World Cup. His free-kick against France in the third-place play-off sealed a 3-2 win and the bronze medal.

**Victor Benitez**
The first Peruvian to lift the European Cup, doing so with Milan in 1963. Later starred in Peru's first-ever international against England, helping them to a 4-1 victory over a side featuring Bobby Charlton and Jimmy Greaves.

**George Cohen**
England's right-back at the victorious 1966 World Cup, and regarded as one of the finest English full-backs of all time.

**Uwe Seeler**
Hamburg's all-time record scorer and one of Germany's greatest strikers of all time, Seeler scored 43 goals in 72 games for West Germany between 1954 and 1970, and captained the team to the 1966 World Cup final.

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI

# "I didn't want to play my entire life just in one league"

The 2021-22 European Golden Shoe winner discusses Barcelona's rebuild, his summer transfer from Bayern Munich and the future

**This is your second ESM Golden Shoe. What does it mean to you?**
It means a lot to me because I know how tough it is to score big goals and so many goals. I am very happy and very proud to win this Golden Shoe for a second time in a row but it's not only about my goals but also about the goals of the team.

**Are you thinking about a third Golden Shoe? Erling Haaland is also very strong at the moment...**
I never think about this. This is something extra at the end of the season. In my mind, I don't think about scoring lots of goals just to win this award. I always try to do my best – not only to score goals but also to help my team. At Barca, it's not only about me scoring goals, but also about my movement on the pitch. So many people watch me and say that if I'm scoring I'm playing well, and if I'm not I'm playing badly. But that's not the case. The style at Barcelona is different and I knew that when I came here, I had to adapt and show I was capable of doing more than just scoring goals.

**Leaving Bayern Munich must have been a difficult decision. What did Xavi say to you to convince you to join Barcelona?**
It was a very tough decision but I knew it was the right moment for me to leave. At Bayern, I had everything under control and I was in my comfort zone. But in my head, I knew it was my time to leave – I wanted to play a long career and continue to be happy. When I started to talk to Barca, I knew for my personal and footballing life that the best decision was to move to Barcelona and play in La Liga. It was always my dream to play in La Liga. Also, I didn't want to play my entire life just in one league and that was another reason, even after I had won everything at Bayern. I will always be proud and grateful for that, but my head was clear and I wanted to move on to Barcelona. I have a new happiness now.

**You came to Barcelona at a time when the club was rebuilding. When do you think we will see Barca back to the level it was in the old days?**
I think that, even in a few months, you can see the progress we've made at Barcelona. At the beginning of 2023 we can show our better performances and we can grow as a team. Even next season will be much better and we'll have more stability. In football, you can win a lot in a short space of time. We've had a lot of injuries and as a result we lost a lot of stability. If you lose stability in the Champions league, you struggle. In that sense, we haven't had much luck. In just a few weeks we lost a lot of players. Then, when you consider we also had to play a new system with a new set of players, it made things even more difficult. But now we've learnt from this and we can move forward.

**What are the reasons for Barcelona's exit from the Champions League?**
I knew that we were not going to win everything in my first season at Barcelona. This team is still being rebuilt and it needs time, this is part of the process. We should be playing the next round of the Champions League, but we have learnt a lot, especially because we have a lot of young players. ➤

LewyBotad
ESTRELL
ESM
ESTRELL
ESM

New challenge...Lewandowski during his Barcelona signing presentation at Camp Nou last summer

We made a few mistakes and at this level, you must always be ready. It doesn't matter how you do it, you need to learn how to win. The three points are the most important.

**Would you like to play with Lionel Messi one day? Have you spoken to him about a possible return to Barcelona?**
Messi is absolutely brilliant with the amazing passes he plays to the striker. If you think about Messi, he has this brilliant connection with strikers. He knows how to put the ball into the box, between the lines – he's the best in the world at that. I don't know what's going on right now, but for a striker it would be a dream to play with Lionel Messi.

**What are the biggest differences between the Bundesliga and La Liga?**
Each league is different, for sure. In La Liga there are more clubs, more games. But it's difficult to say exactly what the differences are. In the Bundesliga, perhaps there are more teams that play defensively and wait to play on the counter-attack. In La Liga, I've also seen defensive teams that try to play with the ball, even at the Camp Nou. I think that the Bundesliga was perhaps more physical, but you have to remember there are more teams here and that's why it's difficult to compare them. Maybe after this season, after a bit more time, I will be able to tell you more about the differences – it's still too early for me to say.

> "We should be playing the next round of the Champions League, but we have learnt a lot"

Eliminated...Lewandowski faced his old club Bayern Munich in the Champions League group stage this campaign

**Your former team-mate Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting has recently morphed into the new Lewandowski! Did you expect him to be so successful?**

In demand...the media jostle for position outside the ESM Golden Shoe awards

If the team plays well, it's easier for the striker. He's scored a few goals now, he's in good form. I know him; he's a good guy. I worked with him at Bayern. I know he's going through a good run. I'm really pleased he's scored some goals but the season is long. All I can say is good luck and I hope he keeps up this form into the rest of the season.

**What do you think about the European Super League?**
I have to say, I don't have much information about this, only what I've heard. I don't have enough information to say more about this.

**Do you want to stay in football when you retire?**
I have a lot of things to do in my life, not just football. But for me, I want to stay in football because with all my experience, I want to be able to help someone and give advice. I don't know what that role might be, but at least part of my life will have something to do with football.

*Interview courtesy of ESM*

Presentation...Barcelona president Joan Laporta hands Lewandowski the European Golden Shoe award

OSIM

# LIVING ON A PRAYER

Napoli are dreaming of winning their first *Scudetto* since Diego Maradona was their lord and saviour

**Words:** Paddy Agnew

In the week leading up to Napoli's first league title win in 1987, a prayer appeared on the windows and walls of Naples. It read:

*"Our Maradona,*
*Who Takes The Field*
*We Have Hallowed Thy Name*
*Thy Kingdom Is Napoli*
*Lead Us Not Into Disappointment*
*But Deliver Unto Us The Title"*

In Naples, football is a religion, and Diego Maradona has been God ever since that 1987 Serie A title. It marked an historic moment for the traditionally underdeveloped "*Mezzogiorno*" (south of Italy), crippled by high rates of unemployment and by the active presence of organised crime.

When Napoli won that title, it was a form of redemption for a poor south, both global and local, which had spent its life with northern compatriots looking down their noses at them. Little wonder that Maradona, the poor boy from the Buenos Aires suburb of Villa Fiorito, continues to be worshipped by Napoli fans; in October, a statue of the great man was unveiled inside Napoli's stadium, which also bears his name.

Now, just over two years after the death of their greatest player, Napoli are ready to write another glorious page in their history, with a new collection of saints ready to be venerated.

The socio-economic problems confronting Naples have not much changed since Maradona was in his pomp: unemployment is still high whilst the local mafia, the *Camorra*, remain disturbingly active.

Since Napoli's last title in 1990, the trophy has remained almost exclusively in the north of the country, in Turin or Milan. Bringing it back in 2023 would be just as momentous as it was in 1987.

When Serie A resumed in the aftermath of the Qatar World Cup, Napoli were eight points clear of reigning champions Milan, ten clear of third-placed Juventus and 11 clear of Lazio and Internazionale in fourth and fifth respectively.

They are now favourites to win the *Scudetto* – their first since the halcyon days of Maradona – and with good reason; Napoli were clearly the outstanding side of the first, pre-World Cup, phase of the Serie A season. Not only did they play high-octane, skilful and intense football in their first 15 games (13 wins and two draws), but they have also already beaten four direct title rivals (Lazio, Milan, Roma and Atalanta), and all away from home.

Napoli legend... Maradona's statue

Even if Napoli have been knocking on the door now for quite some time, having finished second three times in the last seven seasons, it was hard last August to predict such a sensational start. When the season opened, many expected Napoli to struggle, initially at least, after the departure of three iconic players: Dries Mertens and Lorenzo Insigne – the club's top two record goalscorers of all time – as well as totemic centre-back Kalidou Koulibaly to Chelsea.

Yet their recruitment has been so impressive that Napoli haven't just maintained their high standards of recent seasons but significantly improved on it. Winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and centre-back Kim Min-jae in particular have settled in spectacularly well, while Mathias Olivera, Giovanni Simeone and Tanguy Ndombele have also proven to be useful purchases.

Add to that the outstanding form of players like Victor Osimhen and Giacomo Raspadori in attack, midfielders Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa, Stanislav Lobotka and Eljif Elmas, and captain and right-back Giovanni Di Lorenzo, and you have a side that is extremely well equipped to overcome any opponent. Indeed, they lost only one game in the first half of

Just over two years after the death of their greatest player, Napoli are ready to write another glorious page in their history, with a new collection of saints ready to be venerated

Eye-catching...Piotr Zielinski celebrates scoring Napoli's fourth goal against Liverpool in the Champions League group stage

the season: a 2-0 defeat away to Liverpool in their final Champions League group game when qualification had already been secured.

It was Napoli's 4-1 drubbing of Liverpool in Naples last September that initially drew the rest of Europe's attention to this impressive side. They maintained that form throughout the group stage, also comfortably defeating Dutch champions Ajax by an aggregate score of 10-3 and swatting aside Rangers with two 3-0 victories to top Group A.

Going into 2023, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Napoli's title chase is in a strong position.

Firstly, the unprecedented winter break because of the World Cup could not have come at a better time for Napoli. The team played at full throttle throughout the autumn and needed the break. Only five Napoli players – Zambo Anguissa (Cameroon), Kim (South Korea), Olivera (Uruguay), Hirving Lozano (Mexico) and Piotr Zielinski (Poland) – were in action in Qatar, and none beyond the round of 16. Meanwhile the rest of the squad enjoyed a much-needed two-month winter break, two weeks of which were spent in the glamorous Turkish Mediterranean resort of Antalya.

As Napoli head into that crunch springtime period when titles are won and lost, they should be much helped not only by being fresh mentally and physically but also by the calm atmosphere within the team camp, inspired by their great start to the season. So far, the regular rotation by coach Luciano Spalletti has provoked no tantrums from "superstars" left on the bench. Likewise, club owner Aurelio De Laurentis, a man not afraid to criticise both his players and his coach, has been admirably silent – so far.

The other reason for optimism is the relatively muted response from their supporters. In previous seasons, when Napoli have come close to the title, the atmosphere inside the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium has gone from hopeful, supportive expectation to almost suffocating. This season, according to Marco Azzi, the Napoli correspondent for Italian daily, *La Repubblica*, things are different: "Napoli fans are waiting cautiously...they have had too many disappointments in recent seasons."

## KVARATSKHELIA & OSIMHEN

### *Beauty and the Beast*

Georgian left-winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Nigerian central striker Victor Osimhen are without doubt the two brightest jewels in the current, well-stocked Napoli crown. Very different players, they both have such sensational talent that they are always potential match winners. Not for nothing, between them they hit 15 of Napoli's 37 Serie A goals in the first pre-World Cup half of the season.

Osimhen is a wickedly fast, impressively strong and aggressive, "run all day", 6ft 1in tall striker whose commitment to the cause sees him battle all the way. His 80th-minute winning goal away to Roma in October is a prime example of his superlative football skills.

At the end of a tough game, he had the pace to outrun ex-England defender Chris Smalling as they chased for a long ball into the penalty area. Robbing Smalling just short of the by-line, he immediately hit a fiercely struck goal from the narrowest of angles to leave Portuguese goalkeeper Rui Patricio with no chance. This was vintage Osimhen, demonstrating the pace to get to the ball, the strength to win it and then the skill to score from a narrow angle whilst running flat out.

None of the above came as a surprise to Napoli. This is Osimhen's third season in Naples, having joined in a club-record deal worth €70 million in July 2020. This however has, thus far, been his best season in Serie A, having been out with injuries and COVID for much of the past two years.

If Osimhen's huge talent was already well known to the Napoli faithful, the same can hardly be said of 21-year-old Kvaratskhelia, who arrived in Naples last summer as a scruffy, almost completely unknown Georgian for the (now) modest fee of €10 million.

With "KK", Napoli have struck gold. Capable of playing off either foot, pacy with terrific close control, a goalscorer and an "assist" man, Kvaratskhelia, from the famous Dinamo Tbilisi school, has been the biggest sensation of this year's Serie A. So much so that there have been those in Naples who have already taken to calling him "Kvaradona". There can be no greater Napoli fan tribute.

*"Amore Senza Fine"* **...a Napoli supporter holds a flag saying: "endless love"**

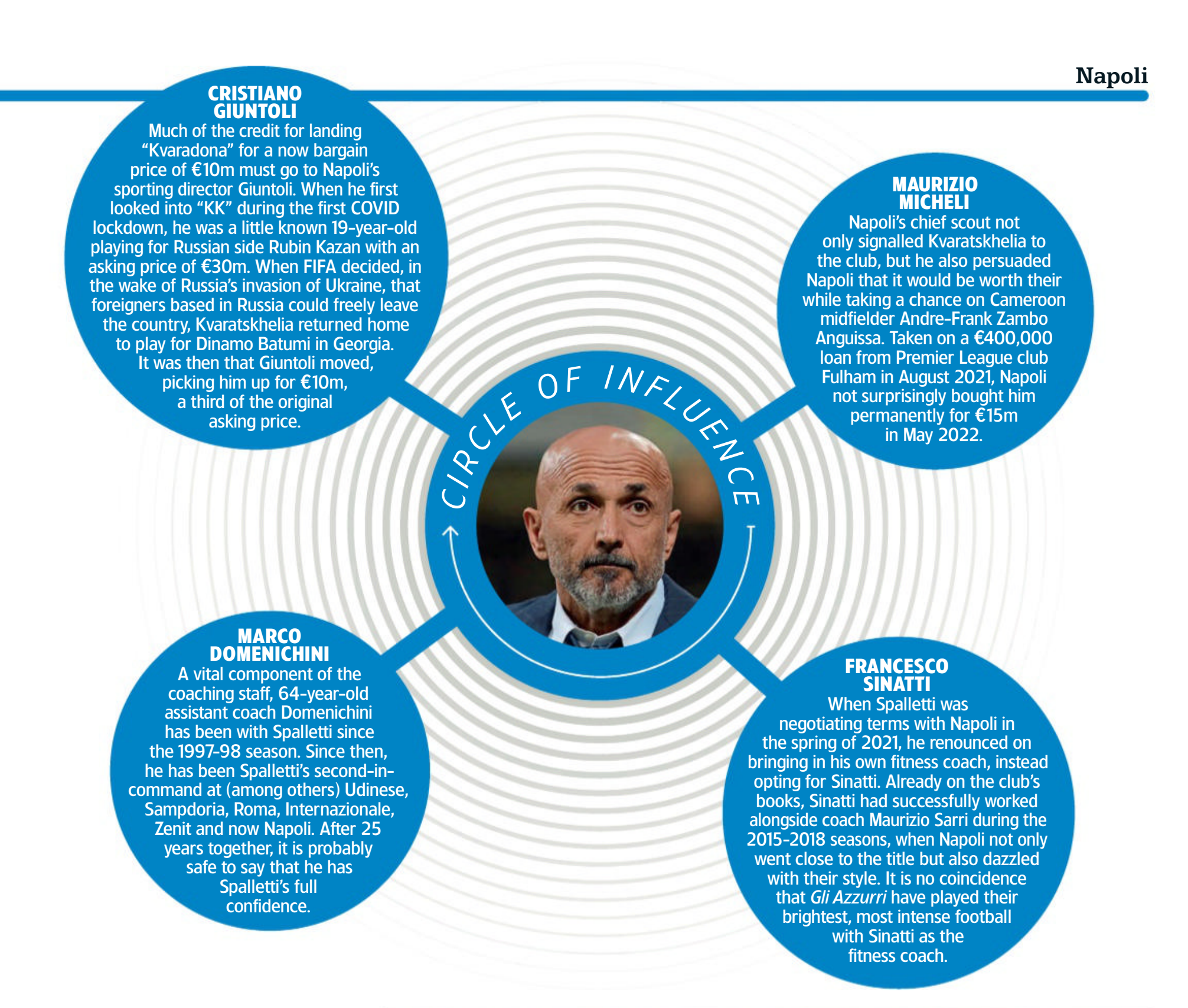
At the centre of all this, trying to keep a lid on the fans' expectations, is Spalletti. Fiercely introspective, the talented coach often seems immersed in doubt as he attempts to explain his football philosophy to the media circus. A useful midfielder with Empoli as a player, Spalletti has had a highly successful Serie A coaching career which really took off when he led Udinese to fourth place in the 2004-05 season, thus qualifying for the Champions League for the first time in the club's history.

> "Napoli fans are waiting cautiously... they have had too many disappointments in recent seasons"
>
> Marco Azzi, *La Repubblica*

That success sky-rocketed his career. Over the next 12 years, he coached Roma, Zenit and Internazionale, three times coming second with Roma (2006, 2007, 2008), winning two Russian titles with Zenit (2010, 2012) and then coming second again with Roma (2017). One is tempted to suggest that, at this stage, only a *Scudetto* is missing from his CV.

That last season with Roma in 2017 will be forever remembered as the year when he found himself at the centre of a huge storm as he struggled to lead the club through what was the last season of much loved, iconic local hero, the then 40-year-old Francesco Totti. For some Roma fans, Spalletti became practically a hate figure as he used "*El Capitano*" sparingly or not at all, preferring younger, more mobile team-mates.

**Goal machine... Victor Osimhen celebrates after the win over Udinese**




Despite the outraged howls of many fans and the criticism of the powerful Rome media, Spalletti stuck to his guns, preferring to ensure a creditable second-place finish behind Juventus, rather than risk results to, as he saw it, indulge both Totti and his adoring fans. To put it another way, it took ice-cold nerve, footballing savvy and a lot of balls not to concede to the lobby of sentimentalism re Totti. Such is Luciano Spalletti.

The 63-year-old coach will need all of that steeliness as the finishing line inches closer this year. Napoli fans may have managed to contain their excitement so far, but the closer that they get to that first *Scudetto* in 33 years, the harder it will be to contain.

In a city that is totally devoted to its football team, prayers will be offered up to Maradona, just as they were in 1987, with the belief that he can help just as much now as he did then. If Spalletti can harness that atmosphere, it will be almost impossible for anyone to stop the *Scudetto* from coming back to Naples.

**Remaining calm and keeping his head...Luciano Spalletti**

# The BIG stories of 2023

## ...before they happen

**Nick Bidwell** takes a look ahead to the stories that will dominate the headlines in 2023...

### 1 SHOULD WE EXPECT MORE INSTANCES OF MULTI-CLUB OWNERSHIP?

Many globalist businessmen with deep pockets are seriously contemplating following in the footsteps of City Football Group (Manchester City, New York City, Melbourne City, etc.) and Red Bull (Leipzig, Salzburg, New York Red Bulls). New Chelsea owner Todd Boehly has made no secret of his intention to create a similar empire, while Arsenal proprietor Stan Kroenke is apparently keen on acquiring clubs in Brazil, Belgium and Portugal. Also in the satellite game is US entrepreneur John Textor, who recently added Lyon in France to a stable featuring Premier League outfit Crystal Palace, Rio's Botafogo and Molenbeek in Belgium.

Multi-club owner...John Textor invested in Lyon last summer

### 2 IS A BREAKAWAY EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE A REALISTIC PROSPECT?

Real Madrid club president Florentino Perez continues to loudly beat the drum for the project, arguing that only a greater number of matches between high-profile continental clubs will keep the big bucks flowing in and maintain football as the number one sport in the world. Such prestigious clubs as Barcelona and Juventus are also in the rebel camp and, in an effort to sharpen up their PR game, the A22 group – the Madrid agency behind the Super League concept – have pulled out an ace in the shape of new CEO Bernd Reichart, once in charge of the RTL conglomerate. The elephant in the room? The visceral opposition of the vast majority of fans.

Wanted man ...Bellingham

## 3 WHERE WILL JUDE BELLINGHAM BE PLYING HIS TRADE NEXT SEASON?

Inevitably for one of Europe's most accomplished young players, the Dortmund and England midfielder is an object of desire for many top clubs, including Real Madrid, Liverpool and Manchester City. Not that Dortmund are ready to cash in just yet. The *Schwarz-Gelben* are optimistic that Bellingham – who is under contract to them until the summer of 2025 – will stay on in the Ruhr for another season and a half. What is for sure is that he will not come cheap. Following his World Cup heroics, there is talk in Germany of a €150 million price tag.

Mbappe... uncertain future

## 4 WHAT GIVES WITH KYLIAN MBAPPE AT PSG?

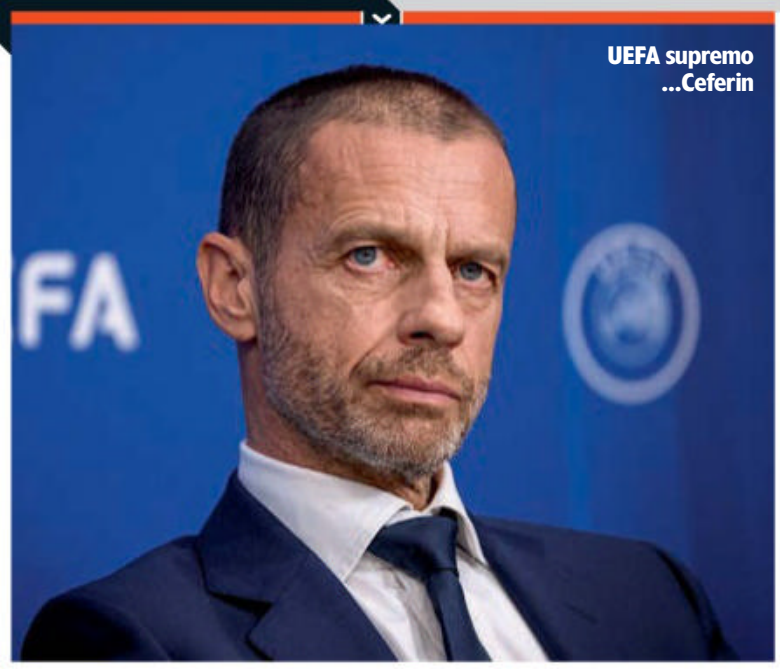
It's hard to decipher the true intentions of the Gallic superstar. One moment, he signs a £650,000-per-week deal with PSG. Just five months later, reports emerge that he wants to quit the Parc des Princes as soon as possible. Then he insists he is happy in Paris. Does he still harbour the dream of playing for Real Madrid? Have some of his PSG team-mates turned against him, unhappy that he wields too much power at the club? Watch this space...

Super League supporter... Florentino Perez

## 5 WILL THE SPANISH CRUSADE TO ATTEMPT TO CLIP THE FINANCIAL WINGS OF MANCHESTER CITY AND PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN BEAR FRUIT?

As hard-nosed as he is outspoken, La Liga president Javier Tebas regards state-owned clubs as an affront to fair competition and, like a dog with a bone, has been loudly promoting this agenda for more than half a decade. Besides submitting official complaints to UEFA, he may take the matter to European courts as well as French and Swiss justice systems. His problem, though, is one of double standards. Only last year, the European Court of Justice ruled that Real Madrid and Barcelona effectively had received illegal state aid.

La Liga chief ...Javier Tebas



UEFA supremo ...Ceferin

## 6 CAN NAPOLI RESIST KHVICHA KVARATSKHELIA'S PACK OF ADMIRERS?

An absolute sensation since joining Napoli from Dinamo Batumi last summer, the Georgian dribbling machine has seen his market worth explode these past few months (from €10m to more than €75m). Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis would, in an ideal world, like to persuade the whizz-kid to sign a new and improved contract, thus giving the Campania club more leverage. But the 21-year-old and his entourage may well see it differently. Manchester City and PSG are at the front of the queue.

## 7 IS ALEKSANDER CEFERIN A SHOE-IN FOR A THIRD TERM AS UEFA PRESIDENT?

The Slovenian lawyer has every chance of being unopposed for this all-important post when the UEFA Congress meets in Portugal in April. He has received letters of support from all 55 member federations and in his six years in charge has banked a great deal of brownie points, particularly from his uncompromising stance against two radical proposal changes: the creation of a breakaway European Super League and the FIFA push for a biennial World Cup. He also proved a steady hand on the tiller during the global pandemic.

Coach... Montella

## 8 CAN VINCENZO MONTELLA COMPLETE A FAIRY TALE WITH ADANA DEMIRSPOR?

Beaten just once in their first 13 fixtures this season, the unfancied Blue Lightnings have emerged as the ultimate surprise package in the Turkish top flight, spending most of the campaign in the unchartered territory of the top four. Full credit to their Italian coach Vincenzo Montella, the former Sampdoria and Roma striker. Hired in the summer of 2021, Montella has done an amazing job in the shortest of time spans, earning praise galore for his side's tactical flexibility, excellence in transition, never-say-die spirit and capacity to share the goalscoring workload (11 different players on the scoresheet in 2022-23).

Rebuild required... Hansi Flick

## 9 CAN THE DFB IMPROVE GERMANY'S FORTUNES?

The decision of the DFB (the German FA) to give a vote of confidence to coach Hansi Flick sparked a mixed reaction in the media. Many argue that a clean break was required, arguing that Flick, a serial winner during his time as manager of Bayern Munich, had lost too much credibility. Meanwhile, a shake-up of Germany's youth development methods is inevitable, with the lack of top-quality strikers and full-backs an urgent issue. In the short term, Flick has a pile of collective problems to solve, especially Germany's inability to defend as a team.

Relegation battle... Sampdoria

## 10 IS THE GAME UP FOR SAMPDORIA?

In the late 1980s and early '90s, a Samp side inspired by "Goal Twins" Gianluca Vialli and Roberto Mancini were a match for anyone. Sadly though, the tables have now turned, with the *Blucerchiati* cutting the sorriest of figures and seemingly locked into a Serie A relegation spiral. With just one win and 11 defeats in the pre-Christmas period, Samp have been flat-lining like never before and despite a change of coach in October – Dejan Stankovic replacing Marco Giampaolo – the song remains as off-key as ever. The oldest squad in Serie A (29.1 years) desperately requires rejuvenation.

Hot property... Kvaratskhelia

## 11 WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR ZINEDINE ZIDANE?

It's no secret that the ex-Real Madrid boss would love to succeed Didier Deschamps as France's national team coach. Out of work since ending his second spell in charge at Real Madrid in May 2021, Zizou has had plenty of job offers (reportedly from the likes of PSG, Qatar and Juventus) but has preferred to remain in sabbatical mode, patiently waiting for a vacancy to open up at the French federation. With Deschamps committing to *Les Bleus* until 2026, Zizou's stance may now change.

Zizou...what next?

Roger Schmidt... getting Benfica back to the top

## 12 WHO CAN BE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DARK HORSES THIS CAMPAIGN?

After edging PSG in Group H and setting the pace atop the Portuguese league, a renascent Benfica are playing with all the confidence in the world. In no time at all, Roger Schmidt has turned the Eagles into one of the most exciting sides in Europe, a thrilling mix of intense pressing and varied attacking play (long balls into the channels contrasting with quick, intricate short-pass exchanges). There is a real freshness and conviction about this Benfica, exemplified by outstanding youngsters like Antonio Silva and Goncalo Ramos.

European champions ...England

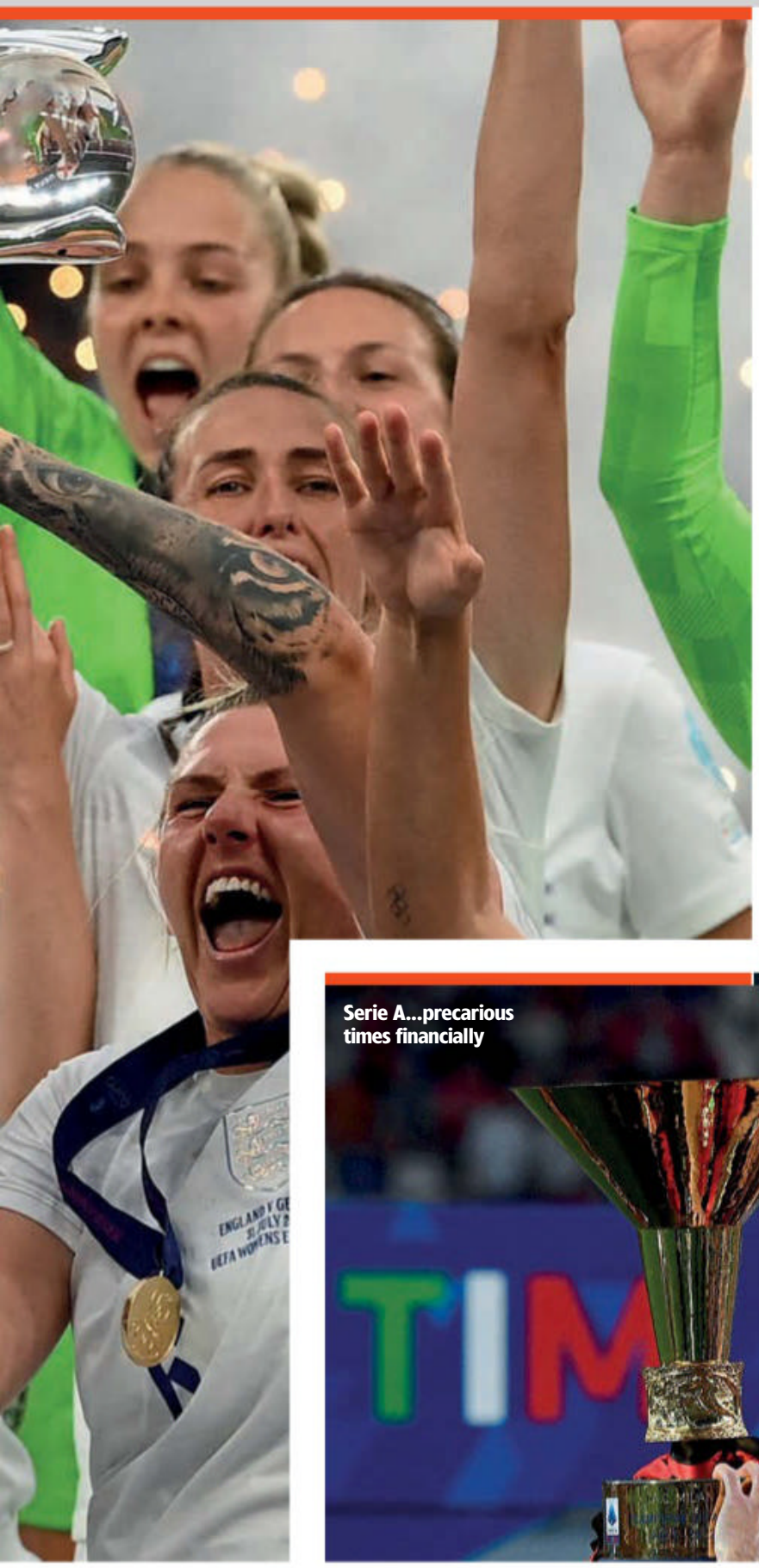
## 13 CAN ENGLAND'S LIONESSES ADD A WORLD TITLE TO THEIR EUROPEAN CROWN?

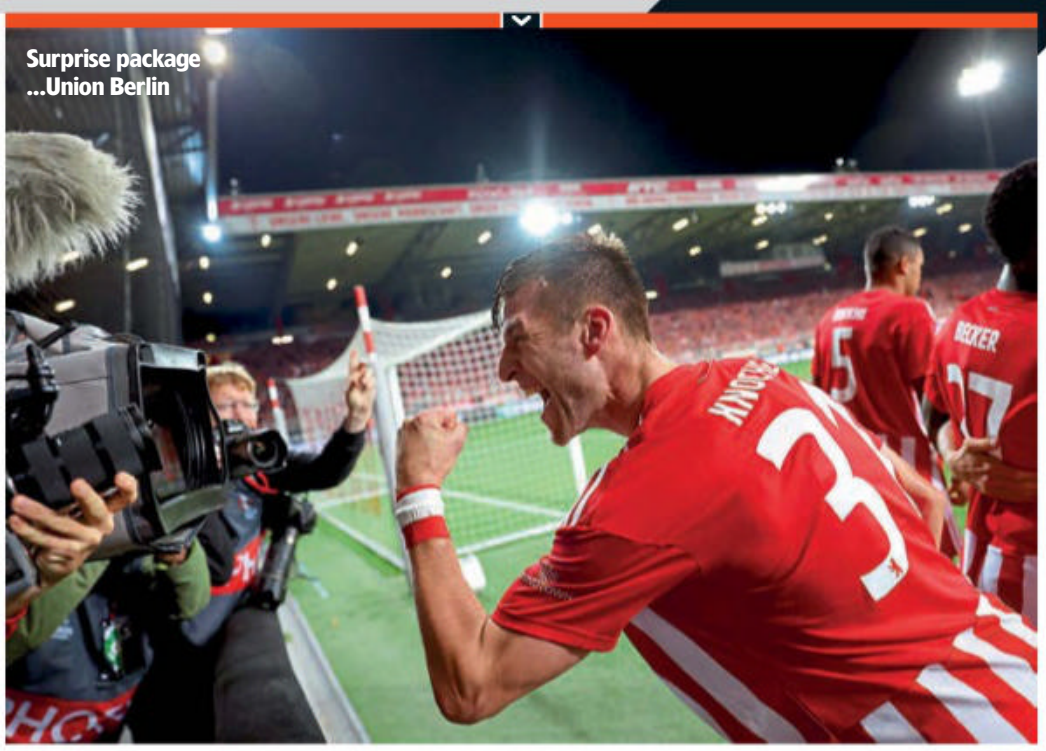
Why not? Victories beget more victories and historic triumph at Euro 2022 will have undoubtedly strengthened the belief in the England camp. Undefeated in 2022 and fresh from a morale-boosting friendly victory over the mighty United States in October, the Lionesses and their brilliant coach Sarina Wiegman must fancy their chances. No matter that legendary players such as Jill Scott and Ellen White have rode off into the sunset. England have more than enough up-and-coming young talent to take up the slack.

End of an era...Sergio Busquets

## 14 HOW WILL BARCELONA REMODEL THEIR MIDFIELD?

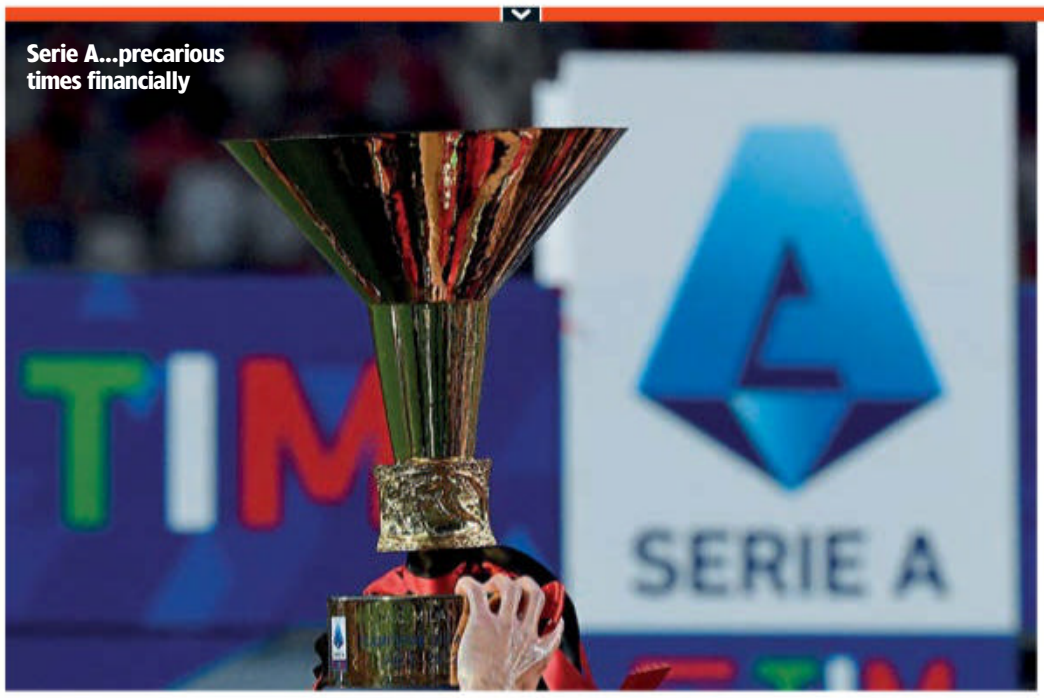
With long-time midfield anchorman Sergio Busquets set to leave Camp Nou when his current deal expires at the end of the season, the *Blaugrana* have a number of names on a shortlist to replace him, including Wolves' Ruben Neves, Martin Zubimendi of Sociedad and Leicester City's Youri Tielemans. Whoever they choose will have enormous shoes to fill; even at the age of 34, the long-serving Busquets remains a metronomic presence in the heart of Barcelona's midfield, and will be almost impossible to replace.




Surprise package ...Union Berlin

## 15 ARE UNION BERLIN GENUINE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE CONTENDERS?

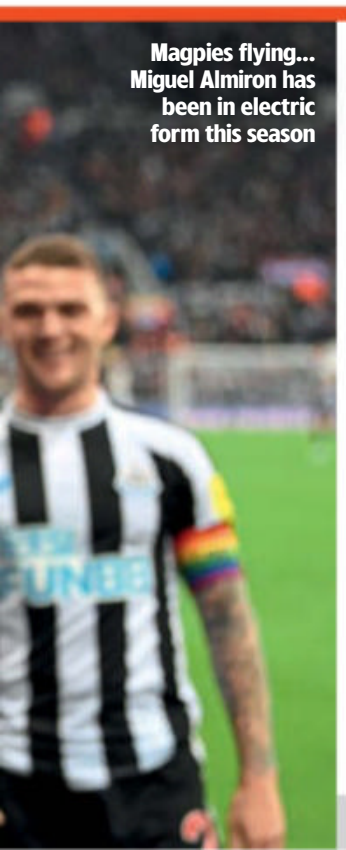
Their record against top opponents in the Bundesliga autumn championship says they are: home wins over Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig, plus a deserved backyard draw with leaders Bayern Munich. Set up intelligently by coach Urs Fischer, Union are strong mentally and are brimming over with unsung individuals, like right-back Julian Ryerson and central midfielder Janik Haberer. Union are the kings of the swift counter-attack, never happier than when not in possession.



Serie A...precarious times financially

## 16 CAN SERIE A RETURN TO ITS DOMINANT DAYS OF THE 1980s AND '90?

Not a chance if you look at the parlous economic state of the country's leading clubs. For the last financial year (June 2021 to June 2022), Internazionale reported red numbers amounting to losses of €140m, while Juventus fared even worse, registering a record loss of €254.3m, their fifth consecutive year in deficit. Serie A champions Milan are in a less perilous state, though still lost €66.5m over the same period. Long gone are the times when Italian clubs ruled the roost in the star marketplace.


Magpies flying... Miguel Almiron has been in electric form this season

## 17 CAN NEWCASTLE BREAK INTO THE PL TOP FOUR?

There is no doubt that by going into the World Cup break in the Premier League top three, Newcastle United are exceeding the expectations of their Saudi owners. Yet they now find themselves with a golden opportunity – will they attempt to seize it with big spending in January, or remain patient? Impressive as the likes of Miguel Almiron, Bruno Guimaraes and Callum Wilson have been, the depth of the squad will be tested to its limits, particularly if the inconsistent Liverpool, Chelsea and a Ronaldo-less Manchester United renew their top-four credentials in the New Year.

Simeone... time up?

## 18 IS SIMEONE'S LONG REIGN AT ATLETICO MADRID COMING TO AN END?

With the *Colchoneros* crashing out in the Champions League group stage this autumn – their first early exit since 2018 – speculation is mounting that Diego Simeone's 11-year spell in charge is drawing to a close. The Atletico fanbase appears split. Fifty per cent think his cycle is over; the other half argue that the club should stand by the coach who has brought them a golden haul of eight trophies during his reign. The word is that ex-Borussia Dortmund, PSG and Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel is the next in line.

WANT IT TODAY?
GO DIGITAL

# In the next issue

***World Soccer*'s March 2023 edition is your essential guide to the UEFA Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League knockout stages.**

Outside of Europe we have reviews of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, 2022 African Nations Championship and 2022 AFF Championship, plus a preview of the 2023 CONCACAF Champions League.

Also, don't miss articles from Japan, United States, Greece, Brunei and Republic of Ireland, plus all of our regular monthly features such as World Service, ESM XI and incisive comment from in-house columnists Keir Radnedge and Jonathan Wilson.

Print **£5.99** | Digital **£3.99**

**ORDER NOW**
shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC23
Or Call: **01959 543 747**

## You may have missed...

November 2022

World Cup Special

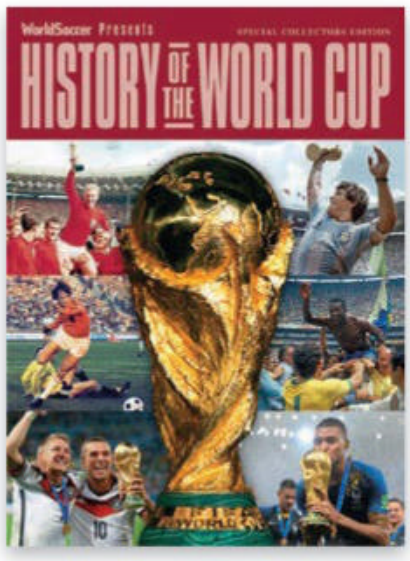
December 2022

January 2023

**SAVE 10%** when you spend £25 or more **VOUCHERCODE: WSCSHOP23**

**shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC23**
+44 (0) 1959 543 747
Offers subject to availability. Prices for goods delivered to destinations outside of the UK may be higher

# Also from the publishers of WorldSoccer



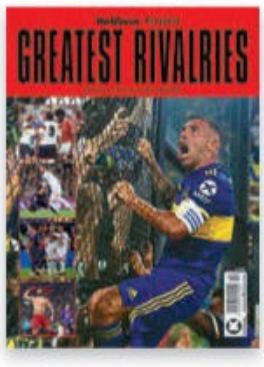

## History of the World Cup

A nostalgic and definitive history of the World Cup, looking back at every finals since the tournament's inception in 1930. Includes match reports, interviews, tournament post-mortems, analysis, team features, player profiles, iconic moments, memorable pictures and much more.

Print **£7.99** | Digital **£6.99**

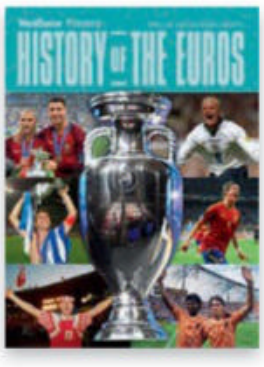
World Soccer Presents

**£7.99** | **£6.99**



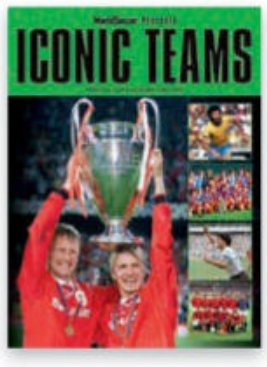

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**




**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**




**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

**£7.99** | **£6.99**

Merchandise

**Spain '82 T-Shirt**

**Mexico '86 T-Shirt**

**Italia '90 T-Shirt**

**Binder**

**SAVE 10%** when you spend £25 or more

**VOUCHERCODE: WSCSHOP23**

**shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC23**

+44 (0) 1959 543 747

Offers subject to availability. Prices for goods delivered to destinations outside of the UK may be higher

Glenn Moore

# London calling

## Arsenal and Chelsea both head into the Champions League quarter-finals hoping to become the trophy's first English winners since 2007

After the opening night of the Champions League, Arsenal fans were in dreamland, scarcely believing they had won 5-1 away to holders Lyon. Coupled with an impressive start to the domestic season, it suggested that the Gunners, still the only English team to win a European trophy, really were back.

By the time the final whistle went on the return match two months later, a gloom had descended on the 7,711 fans echoing around the Emirates in freezing, transport strike-hit London. Not only had Frida Maanum's own goal resulted in a 1-0 defeat, Vivianne Miedema had been carried off with an anterior cruciate ligament injury.

In a cruel twist of fate, Miedema's attacking sidekick, Beth Mead, had suffered an ACL only a few weeks earlier during another home defeat, to Manchester United in the Women's Super League.

That loss allowed Chelsea to move three points ahead of Arsenal, albeit having played a match more, and that is how the pair remained when the WSL went into the winter break.

Chelsea have their own injury problems with Pernille Harder undergoing hamstring surgery in November but that is unlikely to be the season-ending injury that an ACL is, and they have greater depth. Arsenal coach Jonas Eidevall said he would be heading into the transfer market to keep Arsenal's twin assault on honours alive.

Arsenal did at least secure qualification from a tough Champions League group with a game to spare despite the loss to Lyon, by virtue of their superior head-to-head. Lyon themselves went into the final round still needing to avoid defeat at home to Juventus, and achieved that with a 0-0 draw in which they were rarely threatened.

This was not the only group in which three heavyweights chased two places.

> At the start of the campaign there was much debate as to whether Real Madrid were the women's game's coming force. By the end of the group stage it was clear they are not, not yet at least

**Heart-breaking... Miedema receives treatment after suffering an ACL injury**

At the start of the campaign there was much debate as to whether Real Madrid were the women's game's coming force. By the end of the group stage it was clear they are not, not yet at least.

Paired with Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain they failed to beat either, being held at home and losing away to be out of the competition with a match to spare.

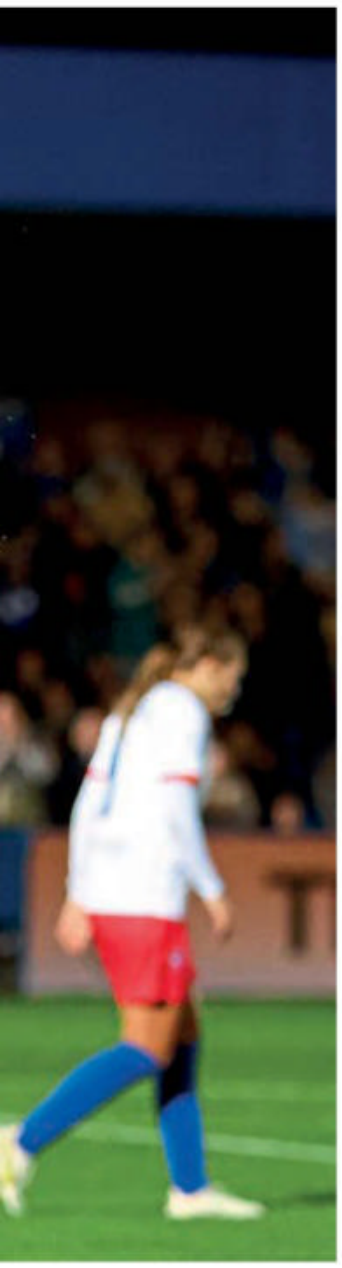
Real's only success came against makeweights Vllaznia, the first Albanian club of either gender to reach the Champions League group stage. Wasteful finishing was Real's main problem, but they are not far away.

Qualifying – achieved with a 2-1 win over Madrid in front of a raucous 16,319 at the Parc des Princes – was a relief for PSG as they search for equilibrium without star striker Marie-Antoinette Katoto, who was injured at the Euros.

It also capped an excellent week for PSG. In the domestic arena five days earlier, Kadidiatou Diani scored away to Lyon three minutes from time just before the winter break to earn a 1-0 win and a one-point lead over their rivals to cherish over Christmas.

The other Champions League groups were more predictable.

Barcelona, beaten finalists last year, laid down an early marker in Group D when they put nine past Benfica with seven different scorers, then won 4-1



Celebrations... Chelsea's Sam Kerr after scoring against Vllaznia in Europe

at Rosengard, quarter-finalists in six of the last ten years.

This was in line with their domestic form. Barca went into the winter break seven points clear with 12 wins from 12.

While the title defence may already appear a foregone conclusion, behind Barcelona a scramble for next season's European places is developing with only four points separating Levante, Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Madrid CFF.

Barcelona's first defeat – indeed, the first match they had not won – came in December when they were beaten 3-1 by Bayern Munich in front of 24,000 at the Allianz Arena.

Barca had cruised the home tie 3-0, watched by 46,967 at Camp Nou, but were caught cold in Bavaria by two goals in the opening ten minutes. By the time Geyse stole the ball from goalkeeper Maria Luisa Grohs to get one back Bayern had a third. It was more than a consolation though. With both teams winning their remaining group games, that goal ensured Barcelona topped the group with Bayern second.

How useful being seeded will be in the draw for the last eight on February 10 remains to be seen. The weakest quarter-final team would appear to be debutants Roma, but they held Wolfsburg – perennial contenders and semi-finalists last year – to a draw at home. In Serie A they ended 2022 three points clear of Juventus despite losing twice to the defending champions including a potentially crucial 4-2 home defeat in the last match before the break.

In a sign of the growing depth of the now professional Italian league, Juventus lost a thriller 4-3 to Milan – for whom star recruit Kosovare Asllani scored twice – dropped points elsewhere and lost the Super Cup to Roma.

Wolfsburg were also held by Slavia Prague, but have won every domestic match so far to be five points clear of Bayern in the Bundesliga with Eintracht Frankfurt third.

At the other end of the table there will be sadness among longstanding women's soccer fans at the plight of Turbine Potsdam, who have one point in ten matches. Turbine were one of the pioneers of women's football, winning the UEFA Women's Cup (the precursor to the Champions League) in 2005 and 2010, beating Lyon in the second final.

Such independent clubs have been increasingly overtaken at elite level as the sport mirrors the men's game. All eight quarter-finalists come from the big five leagues. Moreover, of the 14 clubs from those leagues who began the competition, only Eintracht Frankfurt, who lost to Ajax in the first qualifying round, went out to a team from outside that quintet.

# Round-up

Stepping down... Rhian Wilkinson

### NWSL REELS

A second, year-long investigation commissioned by the National Women's Soccer League and its players' union has uncovered examples of "widespread misconduct" with a number of NWSL coaches and administrators implicated.

Such is the atmosphere, NWSL-winning coach Rhian Wilkinson felt she had to quit Portland Thorns after she and a player developed "feelings for one another". This went no further and a separate investigation cleared Wilkinson of any wrongdoing after she reported herself, but the team asked her to resign.

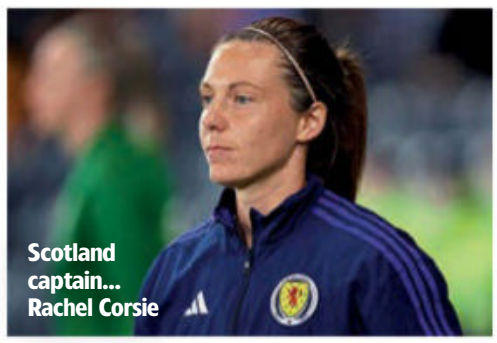
Despite the turmoil the league continues to grow. Real Salt Lake are expected to take up their option to bring NWSL back to Utah in 2024, with a 14th expansion club set to be sited in either Boston (without a team since the Breakers folded five years ago), Tampa or San Francisco.

### CANADA PRO LEAGUE STARTING

An eight-club women's professional league is planned in Canada, backed by Christine Sinclair and Diana Matheson, who have won more than 500 caps between them. Canada are Olympic champions but have never had a national women's league. It is intended to launch in 2025. MLS side Vancouver Whitecaps have already committed.

### SCOTS IN DISPUTE

The Scottish Football Association (SFA) have been taken to an employment tribunal by national team players demanding improved support in areas such as "nutrition, travel, accommodation and medical



Scotland captain... Rachel Corsie

resources." Captain Rachel Corsie said: "Our overriding feeling is we've been disrespected and are undervalued." The SFA said neither men nor women received match fees and were paid equally for sponsor appearances.

### FIFA PLAN EXPANSION

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has re-iterated his desire for a Women's Club World Cup, though not before 2025. Plans are also afoot for a Women's Futsal World Cup and FIFA want to increase from 12 to 16 the entrants to the Olympic women's football competition.

### POWELL LEAVES SEAGULLS

Former England manager Hope Powell left Brighton after five years following an 8-0 defeat to Tottenham. Powell had established Brighton in the WSL and helped develop the club's infrastructure. Former Bayern Munich manager Jens Scheuer has replaced her.

Brighton-bound... Jens Scheuer

### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS

The draw for the Champions League quarter-finals will take place on February 10. **Seeded teams:** Chelsea, Wolfsburg, Arsenal and Barcelona. **Un-seeded teams:** PSG, Roma, Lyon and Bayern Munich.

# MEN'S FITNESS GUIDES

ONLY £4.99

DISCOVER THE FULL COLLECTION ONLINE

SHOP.KELSEY.CO.UK/MFIT

OR

CALL 01959 543 747

LINES OPEN MON-FRI 8.30AM - 5.30PM

Calls are charged at your standard network rate. For full terms & conditions visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/terms

# FREE

## FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES

To receive a FREE programme plus a copy of our latest catalogue (listing several thousand different mint condition Big Match, League, Scottish, Irish, Foreign and Non-League teams programmes etc.) please send your name and address to:

**STEVE EARL FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES(DEPT.WS)**
**BROAD STREET,BUNGAY,SUFFOLK,NR35 1AH, ENGLAND**

or phone 01986 892621 or visit www.footballprogs.co.uk

The Official F.I.F.A. 2022 World Cup Guide (132 pages) £13 (inc.p&p)
The 2022 Women's Euro Final (England v Germany) £15.50 (inc.p&p)

(Credit/Debit Cards & PayPal accepted)

# World Service

INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

94

**STEVE MENARY**
Saint Martin/ Sint Maarten

90
92

**JOHN DUERDEN**
Asian Champions League & China

88

**MARK GLEESON**
Africa

94

PLUS

Cross border competition... Saint Martin & Sint Maarten join forces


**NEWS**

88 African Champions League group stage
90 Asian Champions League west zone
92 Chinese Super League
94 Saint Martin/Sint Maarten

**DIARY**

95 Global diary

**RESULTS, TABLES, FIXTURES**

96 ESM XI
97 Club football
97 Internationals

90

AFC Champions League...west zone knockout phase

Africa

MARK GLEESON

# CAF Champions League group stage preview

## The first round of the 2022-23 competition begins in February

Morocco's two representatives in the African Champions League will be pleased with the way the group-phase draw worked out for them, adding to the footballing excitement in the country as it was conducted just two days before the World Cup semi-final against France.

Holders Wydad Casablanca had three players with the squad in Qatar – third-choice goalkeeper Ahmed Reda Tagnaouti, back-up left-back Yahia Attiat Allah and midfielder Yahya Jabrane – who all no doubt, along with ex-coach Walid Regragui, watched on as they were again drawn with Angola's Petro Atletico of Luanda, as well as JS Kabylie from neighbouring Algeria and AS Vita Club from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Group A.

Wydad played Petro four times en route to winning the last edition: twice in the group stage, including a 5-1 victory at home, and a 4-2 aggregate win in the semi-finals.

There is a lot more familiarity among the other pairings in this year's draw, as the group phase gets underway in February and concludes in double-quick time on April 1, squeezed into an effective seven-week period as a knock-on from the November-December staging of the Qatar World Cup.

Raja Casablanca are drawn again with Horoya of Guinea, this time in

Holders...Wydad players celebrate en route to winning last year's trophy

Group C, and also Simba from Tanzania and Vipers from Uganda, who had upset five-time winners TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo on post-match penalties in the preliminary round to advance to the group phase for the first time.

Raja, who host Vipers in their opening group game, will be pleased with a seemingly easy assignment and have a good chance of emulating their performance of last year when they won five of their six group games.

Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa set a new record when they accumulated 16 out of a possible 18 points last season – the first time this had been achieved since the Champions League format was introduced to Africa's top club competition in 1997.

That included home and away success over Al Ahly of Egypt – the continent's most successful club side – and the two are paired again, which means they will meet for a fifth successive edition.

Last season, Sundowns were unable to deliver on their dominant group-phase form, proving a little arrogant and casual in their approach in the quarter-final and being bundled out by Petro Atletico in a shock upset. It was the third successive exit at the last-eight stage for the big-spending South Africans, the two before that coming at the hands of Al Ahly.

**The group phase is squeezed into an effective seven-week period as a knock-on from the World Cup**

Sundowns did, however, thrash Al Ahly 5-0 in the first leg of their 2019 quarter-final tie – the Cairo giants' heaviest defeat in some 80 years. It was a result that led, a year later, to Ahly hiring Sundowns coach Pitso Mosimane, who has since moved on to work in Saudi Arabia.

Rematch...Esperance and Zamalek last met in the 2020 quarter-finals

The Egyptian giants are now in the hands of Swiss coach Marcel Koller, lastly at Basel but also the ex-coach of Austria, and strengthened their forward line with the acquisition of Brazilian striker Bruno Savio, who has quickly set about scoring goals in the new Egyptian league season. The South African international Percy Tau is also back to form after a long injury lay-off – all putting Ahly among the favourites once again.

Their great Cairo rivals Zamalek have pipped them to the last two Egyptian league titles and play in Group D, reprising their past rivalry with Esperance of Tunisia. It is a group made up of teams from Arabic-speaking countries only, always fraught with tension.

Esperance, now coached by Tunisia's coach at the 2018 World Cup, Nabil Maaloul, have got through the group stage in each of the last six editions of the competition.

Zamalek have the veteran Portuguese coach Jesualdo Ferreira leading their bid. The 76-year-old will need all of his stamina for a difficult ride in the group stage with Zamalek long overdue success in the competition.

They have won it five times previously – second only to Al Ahly's record ten victories. But Zamalek's last success came 21 years ago.

New boy...Al Ahly's new goal grabber Bruno Savio (left)

## THE DRAW

**GROUP A**

- Wydad Casablanca *(Morocco)*
- Petro Atletico *(Angola)*
- JS Kabylie *(Algeria)*
- AS Vita Club *(DR Congo)*

**GROUP B**

- Al Ahly *(Egypt)*
- Mamelodi Sundowns *(S. Africa)*
- Al Hilal Omdurman *(Sudan)*
- Coton Sport *(Cameroon)*

**GROUP C**

- Raja Casablanca *(Morocco)*
- Horoya *(Guinea)*
- Simba *(Tanzania)*
- Vipers *(Uganda)*

**GROUP D**

- Esperance *(Tunisia)*
- Zamalek *(Egypt)*
- CR Belouizdad *(Algeria)*
- Al Merreikh *(Sudan)*

Asian Champions League

JOHN DUERDEN

# West zone knockout rounds finally begin

Eight teams will battle for the chance to face Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan in the AFC Champions League final

Saudi Arabia may have enjoyed the World Cup but now it's time for the country's club teams to fly the flag on an international stage as the knockout phase of the AFC Champions League kicks off.

Before talking about the teams, there are a couple of unusual points to mention. This is still the 2022 tournament, with the group stage ending last April. The second round starts on February 19, and the two-legged final takes place in April/May. This is because of the World Cup and the Asian Football Confederation transitioning the competition from a winter-to-autumn affair to one that mirrors the summer-to-spring European version. Also, the East Asian zone (the tournament is split into two geographic halves until the final) finished its knockout stages in the summer,

Midfield maestro... Al Shabab playmaker Ever Banega

The holders and hot favourites... Al Hilal won the last Champions League in 2021

which means that Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan are patiently waiting for their final opponents.

It could well be a Saudi opponent as three of the western eight are from that country. Al Hilal, who supplied a dozen of Herve Renard's World Cup squad, are the defending champions and favourites to win a fifth continental title. There are not only those who scored against Argentina, Salem Al Dawsari and Saleh Al Shehri, but also foreign stars like Odion Ighalo, who was the top scorer in the Saudi Professional League last season as the Riyadh giants won the title. Alongside him are Brazilian playmaker Matheus Pereira, Mali marksman Moussa Marega and Peruvian winger Andre Carrillo, giving them an unrivalled level of talent and strength in depth.

Al Hilal should certainly have too much for their last-16 opponents Shabab Al Ahli, a team that finished third in the United Arab Emirates league in 2020-21, even if the Dubai team are improved this year so far under coach Leonardo Jardim, the man who led Al Hilal to the 2021 continental title.

If Al Hilal are favourites to reach the final, then their Riyadh rivals Al Shabab are not far behind. Perhaps the best performers in the group stage, they dropped just two points from their six games, scoring 18 and conceding only once. There is, again, a solid section of domestic talent, including standout World Cup centre-back Hassan Al Tambakti complemented by some talented imports. South Korea's number one Kim Seung-gyu has looked very good since his move to the Middle East, with Argentine pair Cristian Guanca and Ever Banega two of the best performers in the league in the past couple of years.

Al Shabab have never gone beyond the last four in this competition, but they are tagetting the trophy. It would certainly be a surprise if they don't make it past FC Nasaf Qarshi of Uzbekistan, who squeezed into the last 16 by being one of the best runners-up after winning just two of their six group games. It should be pointed out though that one of those victories came against Al Sadd, dominant in Qatar in recent years, which means that these Central Asians, who have still yet to win their domestic title, should not be underestimated.

**Al Hilal, who supplied a dozen of Herve Renard's World Cup squad, are the defending champions and favourites to win a fifth continental title**

Al Sadd may be out but Qatar still have two teams remaining, Al Duhail and Al Rayyan, who will face each other. The latter was one of the early giants of Arabian football and seven of their eight domestic titles came in the last century, with just one championship since 1995. A third-place finish in 2020-21 earned them entry to the 2022 edition and there was a fine performance in the group stage as they finished second to Al Hilal only on goal difference.

Al Duhail only came into existence in 2009 and have won seven Qatar Stars League titles since. Coached by Hernan Crespo, the fact that they have yet to get past the last eight in the Champions League is a source of disappointment. With a number of the Qatar national team, such as striker Almoez Ali, and the prolific Kenyan goalgetter Michael Olunga, Duhail have what it takes to go far, though a one-off game between the teams that finished second and third in the league in 2020-21 could go either way.

The fourth tie also looks finely balanced. Al Faisaly are the third Saudi team but were relegated to the second tier in 2021-22. Nine points was enough for them to win a tight group, and finishing two points above Al Sadd was impressive.

It remains to be seen if they can replicate that success against Foolad. The Iranian club made it by winning a domestic cup and have been going well under Javad Nekounam, a playing legend in the country.

Whichever of those two sides make it through, it is hard to imagine them going much further, but that is not the case when it comes to the other three ties.

Underdogs... Foolad of Iran

CHINA

JOHN DUERDEN

# Wuhan's meteoric rise continues

## Wuhan Three Towns claim title after two successive promotions, but the relegation of giants Guangzhou FC demonstrates the decline of the Chinese Super League

It is hard to know what the biggest story was in the 2022 Chinese Super League season. Was it Wuhan Three Towns winning the title for the first time after two successive promotions? Or was it the relegation of Guangzhou FC, the team that had won eight league championships in the previous decade? In the end, it was probably COVID-19, the virus that first emerged in the country and was ripping through it once more in the latter stages of the year as the season reached its climax.

The virus handed Wuhan the title on the last day of 2022, a few days early. After the penultimate round of games, Wuhan were level on points with Shandong Taishan but the opponents of both title hopefuls, Tianjin Tigers and Beijing Guoan respectively, were unable to find enough players. The

**Champions... Wuhan Three Towns players congratulate top scorer Marcao**
*Credit: Alamy*

Key man...Marouane Fellaini's Shandong Taishan finished runners-up

games were forfeited and that was that.

Wuhan, who scored 91 goals, were in pole position for almost the entire campaign. In a remarkable rise, the team won League Two in 2020, League One in 2021 and now have completed a third consecutive championship from three different divisions. That is not the only unusual part about the club, as financially they are not having serious problems. Backed by real estate company Shangwen, the ship has been steady even if the levels of spending are some way off those that saw the Chinese Super League make headlines around the world in the previous decade, investment that reached a peak with over £330m splashed out in the winter transfer window of 2016-17 alone.

That feels like a long time ago now but there are still foreigners topping the goalscoring charts. Defences have been unable to cope with Marcao, who found the target 27 times, and his Brazilian counterpart Davidson, third with 18. With Romanian international Nicolae Stanciu pulling the strings with ten goals and 12 assists in 27 games, Wuhan, led by Spanish coach Pedro Morilla, were just too hot going forward and blew team after team away.

Defending champions Shandong pushed Wuhan all the way, helped by Marouane Fellaini. The former Everton and Manchester United player is one of the few stars left, along with Oscar of Shanghai Port who is also still there, six years after joining from Chelsea. Shanghai finished fourth, pipped to the third and final Asian Champions League spot by Zhejiang.

At the other end, the big news was the relegation of Guangzhou FC. Formerly known as Guangzhou Evergrande, the Southern China Tigers are a shadow of the team that won eight league and two Asian titles in the last decade, success cheered on by regular crowds of over 40,000. The first of the big spenders over ten years ago with coaches such as Marcello Lippi and Luiz Felipe Scolari at the helm, Guangzhou had huge ambitions backed as they were by Evergrande, a leading property developer.

COVID caused, or quickly accelerated, huge problems in the Chinese property market. With a number of teams owned, at least in part, by real estate firms, this became a major issue for the league. Understandably, the football teams had come to be seen as distractions. At Guangzhou, the big-name players left, youngsters were brought in and couldn't cope. They looked doomed from the get-go and only on occasion did they pop their heads above the relegation zone. The club still exists, unlike Jiangsu FC who went bust in 2021 as defending champions, but the fall from the top of Asian football has been painful.

Hebei, another club who had made headlines for hiring coaches such as Manuel Pellegrini, Radomir Antic and Chris Coleman and players such as Ezequiel Lavezzi and Javier Mascherano, finished bottom with a negative points total. The team only won two games, and after being deducted nine points for failing to pay salaries were never going to stay up. Wuhan Yangtze Rivers completed the demoted trio.

**In a remarkable rise, Wuhan Three Towns won League Two in 2020, League One in 2021 and now have completed a third consecutive championship from three different divisions**

There may be a quick return – the financial future of a number of those remaining in the top tier is far from certain, with bankruptcies and dissolutions possible and then replacements needed – but it would hardly be cause for celebration.

Dramatic fall from grace...Guangzhou FC have been relegated

## Saint Martin/Sint Maarten

STEVE MENARY

# Across the border

**The tiny Caribbean island of Saint Martin is forming a new competition that unites the French and Dutch sides of the territory**

**Union...Aristide Conner (left), president of the Saint Martin FA, with Sudesh "Johnny" Singh from Sint Maarten**

Cross-border leagues are often frowned upon by football's governing bodies, but an attempt to unite the club game in the two territories that occupy the Caribbean island of Saint Martin could have major benefits.

The 87km squared island is split along colonial lines, with 41,500 people living in the Dutch territory of Sint Maarten in the south and the French collective of Saint Martin hosting a population of 32,500 in the north.

The Sint Maarten Soccer Association (SMSA) and the Ligue de Football de Saint Martin (LFSM), which represents the French side, were both made associate CONCACAF members in 2002, but development was sporadic. The Sint Maarten league collapsed at one point and Saint Martin did not even take up the subsidised offer of entering the Coupe de l'Outre Mer (the Overseas Football Cup) in Paris for French overseas territories.

In 2013, both federations were granted full membership of CONCACAF but the real fillip came with the start of the Nations League in 2019 – mirroring UEFA's version – which helped revitalise both sides at representative level.

Development at a domestic level struggled to recover from Hurricane Irma two years earlier, but with facilities now rebuilt the game on the island has taken a major leap forward.

In November 2022, the two federations got together at the Grand Case Beach Club in French Saint Martin to launch the SXM Elite Championship, a cross-border competition featuring the top four clubs from both sides.

Gene Kemble, the general secretary of the SMSA, explains: "CONCACAF know Saint Martin is actually already one country, but politically it's still two countries. CONCACAF is aware that we wanted to host a joint competition together, bearing in mind that each federation's own respective domestic competition continues as scheduled."

Sint Maarten champions SCSA Eagles are joined by 758 Sports Club, Belvedere FC and Hottspurs, while Saint Martin have entered Junior Stars, the 2021 domestic title holders, along with Phoenicks, ASC Saint Louis and Attackers.

> **Development at a domestic level struggled to recover from Hurricane Irma in 2017, but with facilities now rebuilt the game on the island has taken a major leap forward**

**Rebuild...Saint Martin was devastated by Hurricane Irma**

Games are being played every Wednesday and Thursday at the Thelbert Carti Stadium in Quartier-d'Orleans in Saint Martin and the Raoul Illidge Sports Complex at Philipsburg on the Dutch side.

After 14 home and away matches, the top four teams will compete in the play-offs, while both leagues on either side of the island will be continuing at the same time as the SXM Elite Championship.

"It's an additional competition to provide more matches for our local players as well as to try to improve the level of play on both sides," adds Kemble.

The competition is the most ambitious attempt to develop the game in both Sint Maarten and Saint Martin and, having crossed one border, the organisers are expanding their horizons further.

SMSA president Sudesh "Johnny" Singh says: "The driving force is to create a semi-professional league in the near future where the best teams in terms of structure and performance can compete. This way it can elevate the football level on our island. Next year we will include the youth and females as well.

"Hopefully in the next two years we can get Anguilla and St. Kitts on board as well."

JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 17

# Global diary

*Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead*

## UEFA Champions League knockouts

The UEFA Champions League returns with the first round of last 16 ties kicking off on Tuesday, February 14 and Wednesday, February 15. On the first night, Milan host Tottenham Hotspur and Paris Saint-Germain meet Bayern Munich in a repeat of the 2020 final, before Borussia Dortmund face Chelsea and Club Brugge take on Benfica on the second night.

Rematch...Kingsley Coman scored Bayern Munich's winner in 2020

## Arnold Clark Cup

European champions England host the four-team tournament for the second year in a row. After winning the first edition last year, this time Sarina Wiegman's side take on Italy, South Korea and Belgium in preparation for this summer's World Cup. Bristol City's Ashton Gate, Stadium MK in Milton Keynes and the Coventry Building Society Arena will host the matches.

2022 winners...England celebrate with the first Arnold Clark Cup

## 5 unmissable matches

- **Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt, January 28**
  The Europa League champions are flying high in the Bundesliga, and are currently in contention for a top-four finish. If they can pick up a shock win at the home of the champions, they could start dreaming of even more.
- **Internazionale v Milan, February 5**
  The second *Derby della Madonnina* of the season takes place at the San Siro. Their last league meeting, back in September, was a thriller as Milan claimed a 3-2 victory over arch-rivals Inter thanks to a Rafael Leao brace.

Match winner... Leao scores against Inter

- **Liverpool v Everton, February 13**
  The last four Merseyside derbies to take place on a Monday night have all ended in late drama, with either last-minute goals or red cards.
- **Arsenal v Manchester City, February 15**
  The Premier League's two front-runners meet for the first time this season. This is the fixture that was postponed following the death of the Queen in September.
- **Barcelona v Manchester United, February 16**
  The standout tie of the Europa League knockout round play-offs takes place at Camp Nou. The clubs have met 13 times in total, but never in this competition.

## Copa Libertadores kick-off

The 2023 edition of South America's elite club competition begins with the first round of qualifiers on February 7. Among the teams in action at this stage are Club Nacional of Paraguay, who reached the final in 2014, and Uruguayan underdogs Boston River.

## Club World Cup

The 19th Club World Cup takes place between February 1-11 in Morocco. The first round sees Al Ahly of Egypt face OFC Champions League winners Auckland City of New Zealand. The tournament also stars CONCACAF top dogs Seattle Sounders (USA), African champions Wydad (Morocco), Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, South American champions Flamengo (Brazil) and European champions Real Madrid (Spain).

# ESM XI

## EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

**SEASON RANKINGS**
Cumulative votes through the season

### GOALKEEPERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid) | 12 |
| Wojciech Szczesny (Juventus) | 6 |
| Yann Sommer (Borussia M'Gladbach) | 4 |
| Alisson (Liverpool) | 3 |
| Gianluigi Donnarumma (PSG) | 3 |
| Kepa Arrizabalaga (Chelsea) | 2 |
| Diogo Costa (Porto) | 2 |
| David de Gea (Manchester United) | 2 |
| Marc-Andre ter Stegen (Barcelona) | 2 |
| Ederson (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Rafal Gikiewicz (Augsburg) | 1 |
| Gregor Kobel (Borussia Dortmund) | 1 |
| Mike Maignan (Milan) | 1 |
| Simon Mignolet (Club Brugge) | 1 |
| Juan Musso (Atalanta) | 1 |
| Rui Patricio (Roma) | 1 |
| Nick Pope (Newcastle United) | 1 |
| Aaron Ramsdale (Arsenal) | 1 |
| Geronimo Rulli (Villarreal) | 1 |
| Brice Samba (Lens) | 1 |
| Kevin Trapp (Eintracht Frankfurt) | 1 |

### DEFENDERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Kim Min-jae (Napoli) | 14 |
| Joao Cancelo (Manchester City) | 12 |
| Eder Militao (Real Madrid) | 11 |
| David Alaba (Real Madrid) | 10 |
| Ruben Dias (Manchester City) | 8 |
| Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid) | 7 |
| Gabriel (Arsenal) | 7 |
| Theo Hernandez (Milan) | 7 |
| Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich) | 6 |
| Kieran Trippier (Newcastle United) | 5 |
| Jordi Alba (Barcelona) | 4 |
| Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid) | 4 |
| Mario Rui (Napoli) | 4 |
| William Saliba (Arsenal) | 4 |
| Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich) | 4 |
| Diogo Dalot (Manchester United) | 3 |
| Danilo (Juventus) | 3 |
| Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich) | 3 |
| Eric Dier (Tottenham) | 3 |
| Thiago Silva (Chelsea) | 3 |
| Pau Torres (Villarreal) | 3 |
| Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool) | 3 |
| Sergino Dest (Milan) | 2 |
| Giovanni Di Lorenzo (Napoli) | 2 |
| Federico Dimarco (Internazionale) | 2 |
| Alex Grimaldo (Benfica) | 2 |
| Achraf Hakimi (PSG) | 2 |
| Roger Ibanez (Roma) | 2 |
| Marquinhos (PSG) | 2 |
| Lisandro Martinez (Manchester United) | 2 |
| Ferland Mendy (Real Madrid) | 2 |
| Nuno Tavares (Marseille) | 2 |
| Rafael Toloi (Atalanta) | 2 |
| Marcos Acuna (Sevilla) | 1 |
| Manuel Akanji (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Nathan Ake (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Toby Alderweireld (Antwerp) | 1 |
| Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Ronald Araujo (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Rodrigo Becao (Udinese) | 1 |
| Ramy Bensebaini (Borussia M'Gladbach) | 1 |
| Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus) | 1 |
| Bremer (Juventus) | 1 |
| Marc Cucurella (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Matthijs de Ligt (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Oscar De Marcos (Athletic Bilbao) | 1 |
| Denzel Dumfries (Internazionale) | 1 |
| Nico Elvedi (Borussia M'Gladbach) | 1 |
| Josko Gvardiol (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Lucas Hernandez (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Paul Jaeckel (Union Berlin) | 1 |
| Reece James (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Kalidou Koulibaly (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Jules Kounde (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Tyrell Malacia (Manchester United) | 1 |
| Noussair Mazraoui (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Cesar Montes (Espanyol) | 1 |
| Daniel Munoz (Genk) | 1 |
| Strahinja Pavlovic (Red Bull Salzburg) | 1 |
| Alfonso Pedraza (Villarreal) | 1 |
| Amir Rrahmani (Napoli) | 1 |
| Alex Sandro (Juventus) | 1 |
| Antonio Silva (Benfica) | 1 |
| Takehiro Tomiyasu (Arsenal) | 1 |
| Kyle Walker (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Ben White (Arsenal) | 1 |
| Oleksandr Zinchenko (Arsenal) | 1 |

### MIDFIELDERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City) | 17 |
| Martin Odegaard (Arsenal) | 10 |
| Pedri (Barcelona) | 10 |
| Federico Valverde (Real Madrid) | 10 |
| Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich) | 9 |
| Jude Bellingham (Borussia Dortmund) | 7 |
| Luka Modric (Real Madrid) | 7 |
| Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United) | 6 |
| Aurelien Tchouameni (Real Madrid) | 6 |
| Casemiro (Manchester United) | 5 |
| Enzo Fernandez (Benfica) | 5 |
| Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich) | 4 |
| Adrien Rabiot (Juventus) | 3 |
| Granit Xhaka (Arsenal) | 3 |
| Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City) | 2 |
| Toni Kroos (Real Madrid) | 2 |
| Marco Verratti (PSG) | 2 |
| Piotr Zielinski (Napoli) | 2 |
| Benjamin Bourigeaud (Rennes) | 1 |
| Hakan Calhanoglu (Internazionale) | 1 |
| Brahim Diaz (Milan) | 1 |
| Christian Eriksen (Manchester United) | 1 |
| Przemyslaw Frankowski (Lens) | 1 |
| Gavi (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Bruno Guimaraes (Newcastle United) | 1 |
| Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Tottenham) | 1 |
| Teun Koopmeiners (Atalanta) | 1 |
| Mohammed Kudus (Ajax) | 1 |
| Stanislav Lobotka (Napoli) | 1 |
| Sergej Milinkovic-Savic (Lazio) | 1 |
| Roberto Pereyra (Udinese) | 1 |
| Bernardo Silva (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Thiago (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Vitinha (PSG) | 1 |
| Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa (Napoli) | 1 |

### FORWARDS

| | |
|---|---|
| Erling Haaland (Manchester City) | 32 |
| Robert Lewandowski (Barcelona) | 17 |
| Kylian Mbappe (PSG) | 16 |
| Lionel Messi (PSG) | 14 |
| Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (Napoli) | 11 |
| Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid) | 10 |
| Neymar (PSG) | 8 |
| Aleksandar Mitrovic (Fulham) | 6 |
| Cody Gakpo (PSV) | 4 |
| Victor Osimhen (Napoli) | 4 |
| Karim Benzema (Real Madrid) | 3 |
| Gabriel Martinelli (Arsenal) | 3 |
| Enner Valencia (Fenerbahce) | 3 |
| Sheraldo Becker (Union Berlin) | 2 |
| Ousmane Dembele (Barcelona) | 2 |
| Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich) | 2 |
| Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid) | 2 |
| Gabriel Jesus (Arsenal) | 2 |
| Rafael Leao (Milan) | 2 |
| Sadio Mane (Bayern Munich) | 2 |
| Cristiano Ronaldo (Unattached) | 2 |
| Rafa Silva (Benfica) | 2 |
| Dusan Vlahovic (Juventus) | 2 |
| Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Olivier Giroud (Milan) | 1 |
| Vincent Janssen (Antwerp) | 1 |
| Jesper Lindstrom (Eintracht Frankfurt) | 1 |
| Alvaro Morata (Atletico Madrid) | 1 |
| Christopher Nkunku (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Dani Olmo (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Dango Ouattara (Lorient) | 1 |
| Ivan Perisic (Tottenham) | 1 |
| Marcus Rashford (Manchester United) | 1 |
| Richarlison (Tottenham) | 1 |
| Bukayo Saka (Arsenal) | 1 |
| Mohamed Salah (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Martin Terrier (Rennes) | 1 |
| Ivan Toney (Brentford) | 1 |
| Ferran Torres (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Hakim Ziyech (Chelsea) | 1 |

**ESM MEMBERS:** *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport/Voetbal* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

# Club Football

## AFRICA

### 2022-23 CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

#### Group Stage Draw

**Group A**
Wydad, Petro Atletico, JS Kabylie, Vita Club

**Group B**
Al Ahly, Mamelodi Sundowns, Al Hilal Omdurman, Coton Sport

**Group C**
Raja, Horoya, Simba, Vipers

**Group D**
Esperance, Zamalek, CR Belouizdad, Al Merrikh

*Group stage commences February 10-11, 2023*

### 2022-23 CAF CONFEDERATION CUP

#### First Qualifying Round

**Sep 9-13:** Kwara United 3-0 Douanes de Niamey; LISCR 0-0 Gagnoa; Milo 2-1 ASC Kara; Douanes de Ouagadougou 0-0 Real Bamako; Hilal Alsahil 1-0 Geita Gold; Fasil Kenema 3-0 Bumamuru; ASAS Telecom 0-0 Kigali; Al Hilal Wau 1-1 Kipanga; Al Akhdar 3-0 Al Ahli Khartoum; Mbabane Highlanders 0-0 Royal AM; AS Sante d'Abeche 1-2 Ferroviario da Beira; PWD Bamenda 1-1 Elgeco Plus; ASFAR 1-1 Remo Stars; Ashanti Golden Boys 2-0 Nouakchott Kings; Buffles du Borgou 0-1 Kallon; Bul 0-0 Future
**Sep 16-18:** Douanes de Niamey 0-0 Kwara United (agg 0-3); Gagnoa 3-1 LISCR (agg 3-1); ASC Kara 3-0 Milo (agg 4-2); Real Bamako 0-0 Douanes de Ouagadougou (agg p0-0); Geita Gold 2-1 Hilal Alsahil (agg 2-2a); Bumamuru 1-0 Fasil Kenema (agg 1-3); Kigali 1-0 ASAS Telecom (agg 1-0); Kipanga 1-1 Al Hilal Wau (agg p2-2); Al Ahli Khartoum 0-0 Al Akhdar (agg 0-3); Royal AM 2-0 Mbabane Highlanders (agg 2-0); Ferroviario da Beira 1-0 AS Sante d'Abeche (agg 3-1); Elgeco Plus 1-0 PWD Bamenda (agg 2-1); Remo Stars 0-1 ASFAR (agg 1-2); Nouakchott Kings 1-0 Ashanti Golden Boys (agg 1-2); Kallon 3-0 Buffles du Borgou (agg 4-0); Future 1-0 Bul (agg 1-0)

#### Second Qualifying Round

**Oct 8-9:** Kwara United 3-1 RS Berkane; Gagnoa 1-0 JS Soura; ASC Kara 0-2 USM Alger; Real Bamako 3-0 Hearts of Oak; Hilal Alsahil 0-2 Pyramids; Fasil Kenema 0-0 CS Sfaxien; Kigali 0-0 Al Nasr; Kipanga 0-0 Club Africain; Al Akhdar 3-0 Azam; Royal AM 0-0 ZESCO United; Saint-Eloi Lupopo 2-0 Sagrada Esperanca; St Michel United 1-0 Motema Pembe; Ferroviario da Beira 2-1 Diables Noirs; Elgeco Plus 1-3 Marumo Gallants; ASFAR 4-0 Ashanti Golden Boys; Kallon 0-2 Future
**Oct 14-16:** RS Berkane 2-0 Kwara United (agg a3-3); JS Soura 0-0 Gagnoa (agg 0-1); USM Alger 2-1 ASC Kara (agg 4-1); Hearts of Oak 1-0 Real Bamako (agg 1-3); Pyramids 7-0 Hilal Alsahil (agg 9-0); CS Sfaxien 1-0 Fasil Kenema (agg 1-0); Al Nasr 1-0 Kigali (agg 1-0); Club Africain 7-0 Kipanga (agg 7-0); Azam 2-0 Al Akhdar (agg 2-3); ZESCO United 1-1 Royal AM (agg 1-1a); Sagrada Esperanca 0-0 Saint-Eloi Lupopo (agg 0-2); Motema Pembe 2-0 St Michel United (agg 2-1); Diables Noirs 3-0 Ferroviario da Beira (agg 4-2); Marumo Gallants 1-0 Elgeco Plus (agg 4-1); Ashanti Golden Boys 0-1 ASFAR (agg 0-5); Future 4-0 Kallon (agg 6-0)

#### Play-Offs

**Nov 2-4:** Rail Club du Kadiogo 0-1 Saint-Eloi Lupopo; Royal Leopards 1-1 Real Bamako; TP Mazembe 2-0 Royal AM; 1º de Agosto 1-1 Future; ASEC Abidjan 2-0 Gagnoa; Djoliba 0-0 ASFAR; Al Ahli Tripoli 1-0 Marumo Gallants; ASKO Kara 2-1 CS Sfaxien; Young Africans 0-0 Club Africain; Flambeau du Centre 0-2 Motema Pembe; Rivers United 5-0 Al Nasr; US Monastir 1-0 RS Berkane; Cape Town City 0-0 USM Alger; ASN Nigelec 1-0 Pyramids; La Passe 0-2 Diables Noirs; Plateau United 4-1 Al Akhdar
**Nov 9:** Saint-Eloi Lupopo 2-0 Rail Club du Kadiogo (agg 3-0); Real Bamako 3-1 Royal Leopards (agg 4-2); Royal AM 0-1 TP Mazembe (agg 0-3); Future 1-1 1º de Agosto (agg p2-2); Gagnoa 2-3 ASEC Abidjan (agg 2-5); ASFAR 4-0 Djoliba (agg 4-0); Marumo Gallants 3-0 Al Ahli Tripoli (agg 3-1); CS Sfaxien 0-0 ASKO Kara (agg 1-2); Club Africain 0-1 Young Africans (agg 0-1); Motema Pembe 2-1 Flambeau du Centre (agg 4-1); Al Nasr 1-1 Rivers United (agg 1-6); RS Berkane 0-0 US Monastir (agg 0-1); USM Alger 1-0 Cape Town City (agg 1-0); Pyramids 3-0 ASN Nigelec (agg 3-1); Diables Noirs 4-2 La Passe (agg 6-2); Al Akhdar 3-0 Plateau United (agg a4-4)

#### Group Stage Draw

**Group A**
USM Alger, Marumo Gallants, Al Akhdar, Saint-Eloi Lupopo

**Group B**
ASEC Abidjan, Diables Noirs, Rivers United, Motema Pembe

**Group C**
Pyramids, ASKO Kara, Future, ASFAR

**Group D**
TP Mazembe, US Monastir, Young Africans, Real Bamako

*Group stage commences February 12, 2023*

### MOZAMBIQUE

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Songo (C) | 22 | 15 | 5 | 2 | 34 | 9 | 50 |
| Black Bulls Maputo | 22 | 15 | 4 | 3 | 40 | 15 | 49 |
| Ferroviario Nampula | 22 | 12 | 4 | 6 | 25 | 19 | 40 |
| Ferroviario Maputo | 22 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 23 | 16 | 33 |
| Ferroviario Beira | 22 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 25 | 19 | 29 |
| Ferroviario de Lichinga | 22 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 21 | 23 | 28 |
| Costa do Sol | 22 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 22 | 27 | 28 |
| Vilanculo | 22 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 21 | 30 | 26 |
| Ferroviario Nacala | 22 | 7 | 2 | 10 | 19 | 27 | 23 |
| Incomati (R) | 22 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 23 | 22 |
| Matchedje de Mocuba (R) | 22 | 4 | 5 | 13 | 16 | 38 | 17 |
| LD Maputo (R) | 22 | 3 | 6 | 13 | 13 | 26 | 15 |

## ASIA

### CAMBODIA

**Regular Season**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Svay Rieng* | 21 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 54 | 18 | 46 |
| Visakha* | 21 | 12 | 4 | 5 | 46 | 23 | 40 |
| Phnom Penh Crown* | 21 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 47 | 28 | 36 |
| Boeung Ket* | 21 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 41 | 28 | 35 |
| NagaWorld | 21 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 23 | 28 | 29 |
| National Defense | 21 | 6 | 5 | 10 | 35 | 32 | 23 |
| Angkor Tiger | 21 | 6 | 3 | 12 | 35 | 61 | 21 |
| Kirivong Sok Sen Chey** | 21 | 1 | 2 | 18 | 21 | 84 | 5 |

*Qualify for the championship round
**Enter the relegation play-offs

**Championship Round**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phnom Penh Crown (C) | 23 | 15 | 7 | 5 | 66 | 36 | 52 |
| Visakha | 23 | 16 | 4 | 7 | 60 | 34 | 52 |
| Svay Rieng | 23 | 15 | 4 | 8 | 59 | 29 | 49 |
| Boeung Ket | 23 | 11 | 6 | 10 | 49 | 44 | 39 |

### CHINA

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wuhan Three Towns (C) | 34 | 25 | 3 | 6 | 91 | 28 | 78 |
| Shandong Taishan | 34 | 25 | 3 | 6 | 87 | 29 | 78 |
| Zhejiang | 34 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 64 | 28 | 65 |
| Shanghai Port | 34 | 20 | 5 | 9 | 55 | 25 | 65 |
| Chengdu Rongcheng | 34 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 49 | 28 | 65 |
| Henan Songshan Longmen | 34 | 17 | 8 | 9 | 60 | 32 | 59 |
| Beijing Guoan | 34 | 17 | 7 | 10 | 57 | 49 | 58 |
| Tianjin Jinmen Tiger | 34 | 14 | 7 | 13 | 45 | 42 | 49 |
| Meizhou Hakka | 34 | 14 | 7 | 13 | 43 | 41 | 49 |
| Shanghai Shenhua* | 34 | 14 | 11 | 9 | 42 | 34 | 47 |
| Dalian Pro | 34 | 12 | 9 | 13 | 49 | 53 | 45 |
| Cangzhou Mighty Lions | 34 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 47 | 51 | 44 |
| Changchun Yatai | 34 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 49 | 50 | 44 |
| Shenzhen | 34 | 9 | 3 | 22 | 29 | 74 | 30 |
| Guangzhou City | 34 | 6 | 5 | 23 | 32 | 62 | 23 |
| Wuhan Yangtze River** (R) | 34 | 8 | 4 | 22 | 34 | 71 | 19 |
| Guangzhou FC (R) | 34 | 3 | 8 | 23 | 24 | 63 | 17 |
| Hebei** (R) | 34 | 2 | 0 | 32 | 18 | 115 | -3 |

*Deducted six points
**Deducted nine points

### TAIWAN

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tainan City (C) | 18 | 11 | 5 | 2 | 47 | 19 | 38 |
| Taichung Futuro | 18 | 10 | 7 | 1 | 36 | 11 | 37 |
| Taipower | 18 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 25 | 18 | 31 |
| Hang Yuan | 18 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 37 | 30 | 29 |
| Leopard Cat | 18 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 23 | 26 | 24 |
| AC Taipei | 18 | 1 | 4 | 13 | 21 | 51 | 7 |
| Ming Chuan University* | 18 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 11 | 45 | 5 |
| CPC Corporation** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*Enter the relegation play-offs
**Withdrew

### TAJIKISTAN

**Regular Season**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Istiklol* | 18 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 38 | 11 | 39 |
| Khatlon* | 18 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 16 | 11 | 28 |
| Ravshan* | 18 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 20 | 17 | 28 |
| Khujand* | 18 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 21 | 13 | 27 |
| CSKA Pamir* | 18 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 22 | 24 | 25 |
| Istaravshan** | 18 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 23 | 19 | 22 |
| Fayzkand** | 18 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 18 | 29 | 22 |
| Eskhata** | 18 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 22 | 29 | 20 |
| Ravshan Zafarobod** | 18 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 19 | 34 | 19 |
| Regar-TadAZ** | 18 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 13 | 25 | 13 |

*Qualify for the championship round
**Qualify for the relegation round

**Championship Round**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Istiklol (C) | 22 | 14 | 6 | 2 | 46 | 13 | 48 |
| Ravshan | 22 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 26 | 23 | 35 |
| Khujand | 22 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 29 | 18 | 34 |
| Khatlon | 22 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 23 | 17 | 34 |
| CSKA Pamir | 22 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 26 | 38 | 25 |

**Relegation Round**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fayzkand | 22 | 8 | 4 | 10 | 25 | 34 | 28 |
| Eskhata | 22 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 29 | 32 | 27 |
| Istaravshan | 22 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 26 | 27 | 25 |
| Regar-TadAZ (R) | 22 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 23 | 26 | 25 |
| Ravshan Zafarobod (R) | 22 | 4 | 8 | 10 | 21 | 46 | 20 |

## OCEANIA

### NEW ZEALAND

**National League**

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Auckland City* | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 20 | 9 | 22 |
| Wellington Olympic* | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 30 | 8 | 22 |
| Auckland United | 9 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 14 | 13 | 17 |
| Birkenhead United | 9 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 19 | 17 | 14 |
| Melville United | 9 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 16 | 18 | 13 |
| Wellington Phoenix Reserves | 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 16 | 14 | 12 |
| Cashmere Technical | 9 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 17 | 22 | 9 |
| Christchurch United | 9 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 16 | 24 | 8 |
| Napier City Rovers | 9 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 14 | 23 | 6 |
| Miramar Rangers | 9 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 11 | 25 | 4 |

*Qualify for the grand final

**Grand Final**

**Dec 4:** Auckland City 3-2 Wellington Olympic

# Internationals

### CHAN 2022

#### Group Stage Draw

**Group A**
Algeria, Libya, Ethiopia, Mozambique

**Group B**
DR Congo, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Senegal

**Group C**
Morocco, Sudan, Madagascar, Ghana

**Group D**
Mali, Angola, Mauritania

**Group E**
Cameroon, Congo, Niger

### FRIENDLIES

**Dec 9:** Malaysia 4-0 Cambodia
**Dec 11:** Thailand 6-0 Myanmar
**Dec 14:** Thailand 0-1 Chinese Taipei; Malaysia 3-0 Maldives; Vietnam 1-0 Philippines
**Dec 17:** Singapore 3-1 Maldives
**Dec 23:** Oman 2-1 Syria
**Dec 30:** Syria 0-1 Oman; Iraq 1-0 Kuwait; United Arab Emirates 1-0 Lebanon

**February 2023** *Vol. 63 No. 6*

**GROUP EDITOR**
Stephen Fishlock

**ASSISTANT EDITORS**
Jamie Evans & Jared Tinslay

**DESIGN**
Sean Phillips, atg-media.com

**PICTURES**
Pictures copyright: Getty Images

**SPECIAL THANKS THIS ISSUE TO:**
Steve Menary, Tim Vickery, Joel Richards, Samindra Kunti, Keir Radnedge, Jim Holden, Jonathan Wilson, Oleg Zadernovsky & Alamy

**EDITORIAL**
Kelsey Media, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

**ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP**
Talk Media Sales: David Lerpiniere
Tel: 01732 445325
Email: david.lerpiniere@talkmediasales.co.uk

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER** Phil Weeden
**MANAGING DIRECTOR** Kevin McCormick
**RETAIL SALES DIRECTOR** Steve Brown
**PUBLISHING DIRECTOR** Oswin Grady
**OPERATIONS DIRECTOR** Gill Lambert
**SENIOR SUBS MARKETING MANAGERS** Nicholas McIntosh & Rochelle Gyer-Smith
**SUBS MARKETING MANAGER** Andy Cotton
**SUBS MARKETING EXECUTIVE** Abbie Russon
**PRINT PRODUCTION MANAGER** Georgina Harris
**PRINT PRODUCTION CONTROLLERS** Kelly Orriss & Hayley Brown

**DISTRIBUTION**
Great Britain: Seymour Distribution Ltd
2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
www.seymour.co.uk
Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland: Newspread Tel: +353 23 886 3850

**SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE**
**+44 (0)1959 543 747**
Lines open Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm

**or visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/WSC**

**SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES**
Full annual subscription rate (13 issues)
UK: £77.87, USA & EU: £91, RoW: £98.

**CONTACT US**
**Editorial:** wos.ed@kelsey.co.uk
**UK subscription & back issue orderline:** 01959 543 747
**Overseas subscription orderline:** 0044 (0) 1959 543 747
**Toll free USA subscription orderline:** 1-888-777-0275
**Customer service website:** help.kelsey.co.uk/support/home
**Customer service & subscription postal address:**
World Soccer Customer Service Team
Kelsey Publishing Ltd, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

**WorldSoccer is a member of**

● La Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy) ● Kicker (Germany) ● Marca (Spain) ● Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany) ● Elf Voetbal (Netherlands) ● Fanatik (Turkey) ● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Netherlands) ● Nemzeti Sport (Hungary) ● Sport/Voetbal (Belgium) ● TIPS Bladet (Denmark) ● World Soccer (UK)

# World Soccer®

## Global football intelligence

**SERIOUS OPINION**
Hard-hitting opinions from the game's most respected writers.

**EXPERT ANALYSIS**
Football's burning issues analysed by expert figures in the game.

**COMPETITION GUIDES**
Essential previews of football's biggest tournaments.

**TALENT SCOUT**
Spotlight on the talented youngsters tipped for the top.

**EYEWITNESS REPORTS**
News and features from our global network of correspondents.

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS**
Face-to-face with football's biggest names.

**Subscribe now to *World Soccer* – shop.kelsey.co.uk/subscription/WSC**
**Or buy individual issues – shop.kelsey.co.uk/issue/list/publication/WSC**

facebook.com/WorldSoccerMagazine

@worldsoccermag

www.worldsoccer.com

SUBSCRIBE AND **SAVE £22**

# MAKE TIME FOR YOU

## BE YOUR PERSONAL BEST IN 2023

## RECEIVE 6 ISSUES FOR ONLY £15

IN EVERY ISSUE

**WORKOUTS**
**FITNESS**
**NUTRITION**
**WELLBEING**

### GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE

Get fit for life + Just £15 for your first 6 months + Save £22 in your first year*
Free UK delivery directly to your door + Never miss an issue

## VISIT SHOP.KELSEY.CO.UK/NY23HMF

OR CALL 01959 543747 and quote code NY23HMF

SCAN HERE

HOTLINE OPEN: MONDAY-FRIDAY, 8.30AM-5.30PM. CALLS ARE CHARGED AT YOUR STANDARD NETWORK RATE

UK Direct Debit offer only. You will pay £15 for your first 6 issues. Your subscription will continue at a rate of £21.99 every 6 months. *Discounts are calculated on full cover price for 1 year. Offer ends 31st March 2023. Your subscription will start with the next available issue. Prices correct at time of print and subject to change. Lines open Mon-Fri 8.30am-5.30pm. Calls charged at your standard network rate. For full terms and conditions visit shop.kelsey.co.uk/terms. Data protection: We take great care in handling your personal details and these will only ever be used as set out in our privacy policy which can be viewed at shop.kelsey.co.uk/privacy-policy. You may unsubscribe at any time.

Edson **ARANTES DO NASCIMENTO** *(Pelé)*

*1940–2022*